

# **Contested Democracy and the Left in the Philippines after Marcos**

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**I declare that this thesis is my own original work.**

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## Acknowledgments

When the Philippine revolutionary movement split in 1992-3, I found myself wondering what I would be doing for the rest of my life. After having been deeply involved in the movement for 23 years (20 years in the Philippines and three years in the Netherlands), I was no longer sure if I should continue being a full-time political activist as I had been through most of that time. What had gotten me involved in activism in the first place – an identification with the poor and oppressed and their struggles for social justice – remained very strong in me. But my personal circumstances had greatly changed. For one, I was in the Netherlands, waiting for my application for political asylum to be approved. More importantly, I felt very much theoretically inadequate. I believed that the long years of following – or sometimes working around – the party line had somehow straitjacketed my thinking and that I was out of touch with what was being discussed in theoretical debates within the modern left and within intellectual circles in general.

After a long absence of 18 years, I returned to the academe, pursuing an M.A. in International Relations at the University of Amsterdam. At that time, I was not yet really of thinking of shifting to an academic profession. I just felt that I would need a university degree to find a good job. (Like many of my activist-contemporaries, I had not been able to finish my A.B., having gone on to working full-time in the anti-Marcos dictatorship movement.) I also felt that the studies would perhaps help me get rid of intellectual fixations and rigidities.

I remained undecided about career options even after getting refugee status and finishing my M.A. in 1994. Also even after acquiring Dutch nationality in 1996. Finally, in 1998, I decided to explore the option of a scholarly career. I returned to the Philippines and taught political science and sociology at the University of the Philippines (UP). While teaching, I tried to build (or rebuild) and maintain close links with various progressive political and social movements and groups, people's organizations and non-governmental organizations. I also became involved in a research project on the armed conflict and peace process in Mindanao. It was in the course of my teaching stint at UP that I finally resolved

to shift to an academic career. I realized that by conducting studies on important political and social issues and developments with scholarly rigor, taking into account critical new concepts and theories, I would directly or indirectly be helping those seeking to bring about progressive political and social change. I believed that an academic career would serve as a good complement to my past activist life, and perhaps the consummation of it: the activist-scholar.

Turning oneself from a revolutionary activist into an academic is not particularly difficult. But the going gets rough when one is already well above forty. I am indebted to many friends, a good number of whom were former *kasamas* (comrades) in the movement, who gave recommendations or agreed to serve as references, and thus helped me in landing my first teaching job and/or getting a Ph.D. scholarship. In particular, I give my thanks to Joel Rocamora, Dodong Nemenzo, Jenny Franco and Jun Borrás, Walden Bello and Len Abesamis, Kit Collier, Cynch Bautista, Jojo Abinales, Temy Rivera, Raul Pertierra, Randy David, Henk Overbeek, Kees Biekart, Ed Tadem and Tesa Encarnacion-Tadem, Maris Diokno, Jean Miralao, Lester Ruiz, Men Sta. Ana, and Wingie Villamil. I also thank John Sidel, whose advice and MPhil seminars at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London helped provide me with good theoretical preparation.

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My sisters Emilie and Lillian, and their husbands Phil Wickett and the late John Walsh, even while based in the other side of the Australian continent

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In conducting my fieldwork in the Philippines, I am indebted to many former *kasamas* in the movement and to the staff of various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who facilitated my field visits and interviews. I am especially grateful to: Joel Rocamora (again) and the staff of the Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD), who took me in as a research fellow and provided me with a most welcoming, collegial and stimulating place to work; Rey ("Enteng") Gueco, who always kept me abreast with ideological, political and organizational controversies and debates within the left, and who always and promptly gave good critiques of my drafts; and Roy and Tina Delima, who greatly facilitated my field visits to various areas in Mindanao and who, by drawing me more into a participant-observer role, helped me gain much deeper insights into the left's engagement in various political processes. I also express my thanks to: Ric Reyes, Ronald Llamas, Melay Abao, Etta Rosales, Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel, Marie Labajo and Teng Ambolodto of Akbayan; Councilor Pete Laviña and his wife Evelyn; the staffs of People's Alternative Development Center (PADC), SIAD Initiatives in Mindanao – Convergence for Agrarian Reform and Regional Development (SIM-CARRD) and the Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao (Afrim) in Davao City; Mayor Eksam Lloren and his staff in Jagna, Bohol; the staffs of People's Institute for Local Governance Advocacy and Research (Pilar) and Center for Agrarian Reform Empowerment and Transformation (Caret) in Laguna; the staff of Solidarity for Peace, Empowerment and Equity-led Development (Speed) in Cotabato City; Rodel Mercado and the staff of Pneuma in Eastern Samar; Mayor Jay Zacate of Sulat, Eastern Samar; Mayor Jerry dela Cerna of Governor Generoso, Davao Oriental; Councilor Len Magayanes and the staff of the Center for Advocacy and Participatory Governance (CAPG); Tom Villarín and the staff of the Institute of Politics and Governance (IPG); Vimvim Santos and the staff of People's Global Exchange (PGX); Mon Casiple and the staff of the Institute for Political and Electoral Reform (IPER); Gerry Bulatao, Orlando Balean and the staff of Empowering Civic Participation in Governance (ECPG); and Lecie Arce and Helen Bonga of Sanlakas. I also appreciate the help of those who provided me with materials or comments on my drafts – Thea

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(Note: All the maps listed above have been produced by the staff of the Cartographic Services Office, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australia National University.)



## Abbreviations and Acronyms

**ABA** – *Alyansang Bayanihan ng mga Magsasaka, Manggagawang-Bukid at Mangingisda* (Cooperative Alliance of Peasants, Farm Workers and Fishers)

**ACF** – Active Citizenship Foundation

**Akbayan** – *Kaakbay ng Sambayanan* (Ally of the People)

**AKO** – *Adhikain at Kilusan ng Ordinaryong Tao* (Aspirations and Movement of the Common People)

**AMIN** – Anak-Mindanao (Scions of Mindanao)

**Aniad** – Antique Integrated Area Development

**ANP** – Alliance for New Politics

**APL** – Alliance of Progressive Labor

**ARC** – agrarian reform community

**ARMM** – Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao

**Bandila** – *Bansang Nagkaisa sa Diwa at Layunin* (Nation United in Spirit and Purpose)

**BAP** – Bankers' Association of the Philippines

**Barrios** – Building Alternative Rural Resource Institutions and Organizing Services

**Batman** – Barangay Administration Training Manual

**Batman Consortium** – Barangay-Bayan Governance Consortium (BBGC)

**Bayan** – *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (New Patriotic Alliance)

**BBGC** – Barangay-Bayan Governance Consortium; also called "Batman Consortium"

**BDP-PRA** – Barangay Development Planning through Participatory Resource Appraisal

**BIADP** – Barangay Integrated Area Development Program

**Bisig** – *Bukluran para sa Ikauunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa* (Federation for the Advancement of Socialist Theory and Praxis)

**Biglead** – Bicol Grassroots Leaders for Empowerment and Development

**BMP** – *Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino* (Solidarity of Filipino Workers)

**BOBG** – Basic Orientation for Barangay Governance

**CAHRIHL** – Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law

**Caret** – Center for Agrarian Reform Empowerment and Transformation  
**CARP** – Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme  
**CBCP** – Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines  
**CCR** – Consortium on Constitutional Reform  
**CER** – Consortium on Electoral Reforms  
**CFC 04** – Citizens for Con-Con 2004  
**CMR** – Central Mindanao Region (of the Communist Party of the Philippines)  
**CODE-NGO** – Caucus of Development NGO Networks  
**Comelec** – Commission on Elections  
**Compel** – Citizens for a Meaningful and Peaceful Elections  
**Con-Ass** – Constituent Assembly  
**Con-Con** – Constitutional Convention  
**ConCom** – Constitutional Commission  
**Concord** – Constitutional Correction for Development  
**CPAR** – Congress for a People’s Agrarian Reform  
**CPGD** – Center for Politics, Governance and Development  
**CPP** – Communist Party of the Philippines  
**CPT** – Communist Party of Thailand  
**CSO** – civil society organization

**DA** – Democratic Alliance  
**DG** – discussion group  
**Dialogs** – Direct Action for Local Governance Seminar  
**DILG** – Department of Interior and Local Government  
**DPA** – deep-penetration agent  
**DSK** – *Demokratiko Sosyalistang Koalisyon* (Democratic Socialist Coalition)

**ECOP** – Employers Confederation of the Philippines  
**ECPG** – Empowering Civic Participation in Governance  
**EDSA** – Epifanio de los Santos Avenue  
**ELF** – Education for Life Foundation  
**Empower** – Global Coalition for the Political Empowerment of Overseas Filipinos

**FDC** – Freedom from Debt Coalition  
**FOPA** – Forum for Philippine Alternatives

**GDP** – gross domestic product

**Caret** – Center for Agrarian Reform Empowerment and Transformation  
**CARP** – Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme  
**CBCP** – Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines  
**CCR** – Consortium on Constitutional Reform  
**CER** – Consortium on Electoral Reforms  
**CFC 04** – Citizens for Con-Con 2004  
**CMR** – Central Mindanao Region (of the Communist Party of the Philippines)  
**CODE-NGO** – Caucus of Development NGO Networks  
**Comelec** – Commission on Elections  
**Compel** – Citizens for a Meaningful and Peaceful Elections  
**Con-Ass** – Constituent Assembly  
**Con-Con** – Constitutional Convention  
**ConCom** – Constitutional Commission  
**Concord** – Constitutional Correction for Development  
**CPAR** – Congress for a People’s Agrarian Reform  
**CPGD** – Center for Politics, Governance and Development  
**CPP** – Communist Party of the Philippines  
**CPT** – Communist Party of Thailand  
**CSO** – civil society organization

**DA** – Democratic Alliance  
**DG** – discussion group  
**Dialogs** – Direct Action for Local Governance Seminar  
**DILG** – Department of Interior and Local Government  
**DPA** – deep-penetration agent  
**DSK** – *Demokratiko Sosyalistang Koalisyon* (Democratic Socialist Coalition)

**ECOP** – Employers Confederation of the Philippines  
**ECPG** – Empowering Civic Participation in Governance  
**EDSA** – Epifanio de los Santos Avenue  
**ELF** – Education for Life Foundation  
**Empower** – Global Coalition for the Political Empowerment of Overseas Filipinos

**FDC** – Freedom from Debt Coalition  
**FOPA** – Forum for Philippine Alternatives

**GDP** – gross domestic product

**GNP** – gross national product

**GO** – governmental organization

**HMB** – *Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* (People's Liberation Army)

**Hukbalahap** – *Hukbo ng Bayan laban sa mga Hapon* (People's Anti-Japanese Army)

**IAD** – integrated area development

**IBP** – *Interim Batasang Pambansa* (Interim National Parliament)

**IDC** – Iranun Development Council

**IDPG** – Institute for Democratic Participation in Governance

**IMF** – International Monetary Fund

**IPER** – Institute for Political and Electoral Reform

**IPG** – Institute of Politics and Governance

**ISI** – Institute for Strategic Initiatives

**Kaiba** – *Kababaihan para sa Inang Bayan* (Women for the Mother Country)

**Kaisahan** – *Kaisahan Tungo sa Kaunlaran ng Kanayunan at Repormang Pansakahan* (Unity for Rural Progress and Agricultural Reform)

**KAKAMMPI** – *Kapisanan ng mga Kamag-anak ng Migranteng Manggagawang Pilipino, Inc.* (Association of Families of Overseas Filipino Workers and Migrant Returnees)

**Kalahi** – *Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan* (Linking Arms against Poverty)

**Kampi** – *Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino* (Partner of the Free Filipino)

**Kasapi** – *Kapuhungan ng mga Sandigan ng Pilipinas* (Assembly of Pillars of the Philippines)

**KBL** – *Kilusan ng Bagong Lipunan* (New Society Movement)

**KFR** – kidnapping-for-ransom

**KMU** – *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (May First Movement)

**Kompil** – *Kongreso ng Mamamayang Pilipino* (Congress of Filipino Citizens)

**KPD** – *Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya* (Movement for Nationalism and Democracy)

**KPML** – *Kongreso ng Pagkakaisa ng Maralitang Lungsod* (Unity Congress of the Urban Poor)

**Kumare-Kumpare** – *Kilusang Mamamayan para sa Repormang Elektoral* (People's Movement for Electoral Reform)

**Laban** – *Lakas ng Bayan* (Strength of the People)

**LACC** – Labor Advisory and Consultative Council

**LAMMP** – *Laban ng Makabayang Masang Pilipino* (Struggle of the Nationalist Filipino Masses)

**Lakas** – *Lakas ng Sambayanan* (Strength of the People)

**LDP** – *Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino* (Struggle of Democratic Filipinos)

**LEARN** - Labor Education and Research Network

**LGC** – Local Government Code

**LGCNet** – Local Governance Citizens' Network

**LGU** – local government unit

**LP** – Liberal Party

**MILF** – Moro Islamic Liberation Front

**MLPP** – *Marxista-Leninistang Partido ng Pilipinas* (Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines)

**MNLF** – Moro National Liberation Front

**NaFFAA** – National Federation of Filipino-American Associations

**NAMFREL** – National Citizens Movement for Free Elections

**NAPC** – National Anti-Poverty Commission

**ND** – national democratic (adj.) or national democrat (n.)

**NDF** – National Democratic Front

**NGO** – non-governmental organization

**NP** – Nacionalista Party (Nationalist Party)

**NPA** – New People's Army

**NPC** – Nationalist People's Coalition

**NSC** – National Security Council

**NUCD** – National Union of Christian Democrats

**OF** – overseas Filipino

**PADC** – People's Alternative Development Center

**Pakisama** – *Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka* (National Movement of Farmers' Organizations)

**Pandayan** – *Pandayan para sa Sosyalistang Pilipinas* (Forging a Socialist Philippines)

**PARRDS** – Partnership for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development Services Inc.

**PDAN** - Philippine Drug Action Network

**PDP** – *Partido ng Demokratikong Pilipino* (Filipino Democratic Party)

**PDSP** – *Partido Demokratiko Sosyalista ng Pilipinas* (Democratic Socialist Party of the Philippines)

**PEPE** – Popular Education for Popular Empowerment

**Philnet-RDI** - Philippine Network of Rural Development Institutes

**Pilar** – People’s Institute for Local Governance Advocacy and Research

**Pinatubo** – *Pinag-isang Lakas sa Pagbabago* (Consolidated Power for Change)

**Pirma** – People’s Initiative for Reform, Modernization and Action

**PKI** – *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (Indonesian Communist Party)

**PKP** – *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (Communist Party of the Philippines)

**PM** – *Partido ng Manggagawa* (Workers’ Party)

**PMP (1)** – *Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas* (Filipino Workers’ Party)

**PMP (2)** – *Partido ng Masang Pilipino* (Party of the Filipino Masses)

**PnB** – *Partido ng Bayan* (People’s Party)

**PO** – people’s organization

**Popdem** – popular democratic (adj.) or popular democrat (n.)

**Pop-ed** – popular (political) education

**PPC** – People Power Coalition

**PPD** – *Partido Proletaryo Demokratiko* (Democratic Proletarian Party)

**PRA** – Participatory Rural Appraisal

**Prodem** – Promoting Local Initiatives for Democracy and Justice

**PRRM** – Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement

**PT** – *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers’ Party of Brazil)

**PTC** – “permit-to campaign”

**RPM-M** – *Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa - Mindanao*  
(Revolutionary Workers Party - Mindanao)

**RPM-P** – *Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa - Pilipinas*  
(Revolutionary Workers Party - Philippines)

**Saligan** – *Sentro ng Alternatibong Lingap Panligal* (Center for Alternative Legal Assistance)

**SD** – social democratic (adj.) or social democrat (n.)

**SEED** - Small Economic Enterprises Development, Inc.

**SEW** – socio-economic work

**SIAD** – sustainable integrated area development

**Siglaya** – *Siglo ng Paglaya* (Century of Freedom)

**SIM-CARRD** – SIAD Initiatives in Mindanao – Convergence for Agrarian Reform and Regional Development

**SK** – *Sangguniang Kabataan* (Youth Council)

**SKDOP** – Sultan Kudarat Descendants Organization of the Philippines  
**Speed** – Solidarity for Peace, Empowerment and Equity-led Development  
**SPP (1)** – Socialist Party of the Philippines  
**SPP (2)** – *Sosyalistang Partido ng Paggawa* (Socialist Workers' Party)  
**SRA** – Social Reform Agenda

**Trapo** – traditional politician

**UG** – underground

**Ugnayan-Victoria** – *Ugnayan ng mga Mamamayan Tungo sa Kaunlaran ng Victoria* (People's Coordinating Council for the Development of Victoria)

**Ugnayan-LB** – *Ugnayan ng mga Samahang Pamayanan ng Los Baños* (Coordinating Council of Community Organizations of Los Baños)

**ULR-TF** – Urban Land Reform Task Force

**UNDP** – United Nations Development Programme

**USAID** – United States Agency for International Development

**WB** – World Bank

## Abstract

When “people power” toppled Marcos in 1986, the Philippines was held up throughout the world as a shining example of the restoration of democracy. Since then, however, scholars of Philippine politics have qualified the country’s democracy with various depreciatory adjectives: “elite democracy,” “cacique democracy,” a “weak state” dominated by powerful political families; “patrimonial oligarchic state”; “boss-democracy,” etc.

How exactly is democracy – and politics, in general – in the Philippines to be characterized or interpreted? What is being done to deepen Philippine democracy and to rid it of the various depreciatory adjectives being appended to it? What role is the left playing in this process? Is the Philippine left a democratizing force or is it a threat to democracy?

I put forward a three-part argument. The first part consists of an alternative interpretative framework of Philippine politics. The three prominent interpretations of Philippine politics – the patron-client framework, the elite-democracy or patrimonial view, and the neocolonial or dependency analysis – tend to be somewhat incomplete, static and top-down. The “elite democracy” view, which I believe has now emerged as the dominant interpretation (with such variants as “cacique democracy,” “patrimonial oligarchic state” and “bossism”), tends to focus only on elite action and intra-elite competition, and to ignore the efforts towards popular empowerment and social justice of many Filipinos – but especially the poor and marginalized classes, sectors and communities – for “democracy from below.” The Philippines, I contend, is a “contested democracy.”

In the second part, I argue that the deepening of democracy in the Philippines depends a great deal on the outcome of the contest between “elite democracy” and “democracy from below.” The oligarchic elite basically seeks to maintain a deficient type of formal liberal democracy in which it dominates, while the subordinate classes and communities want to transform this truncated formal democracy into something more substantive – i.e., to deepen it into a participatory and egalitarian democracy.

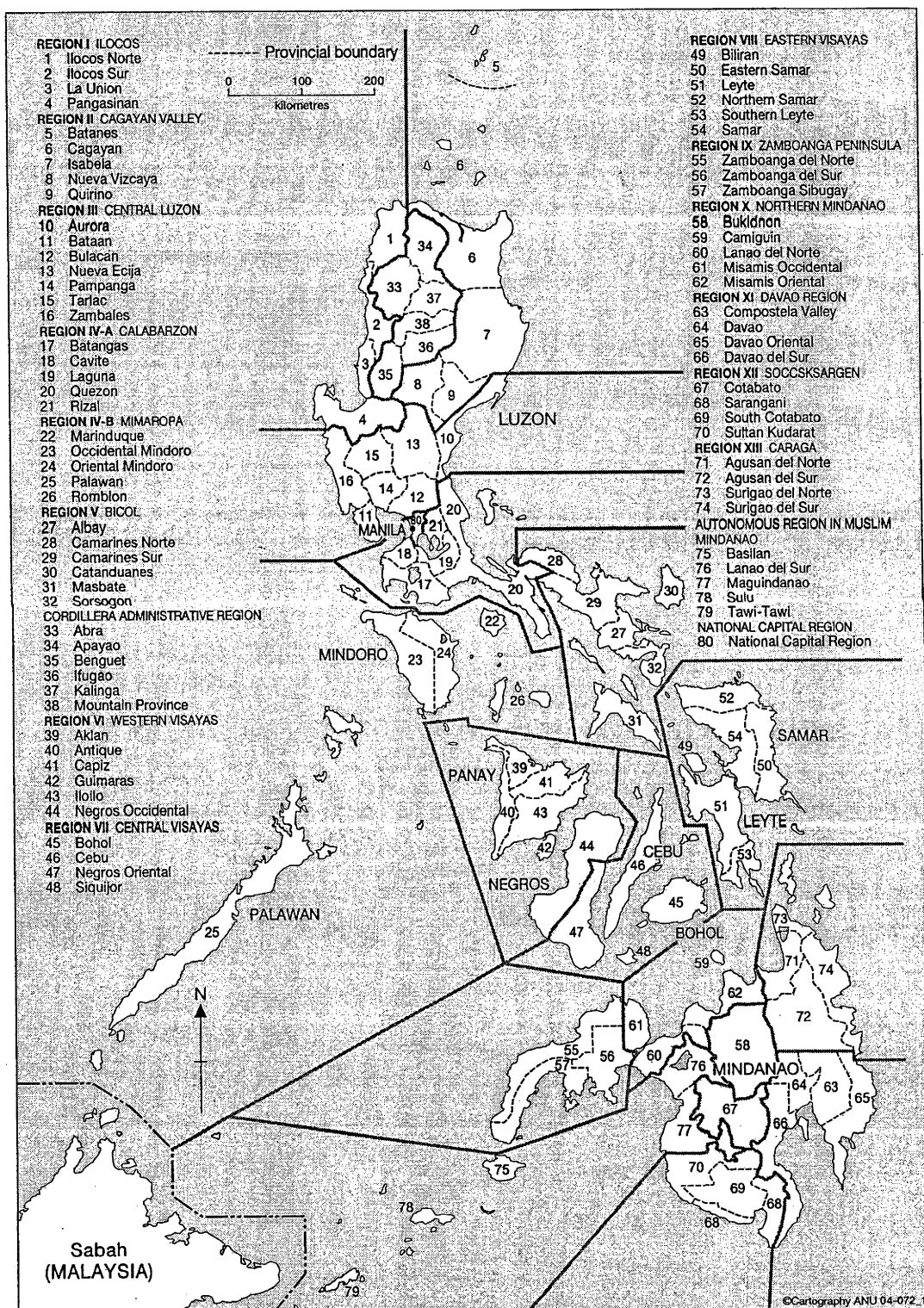


The third part of my argument has to do with the Philippine left – a political force that has long challenged elite rule and that avowedly fights for “democracy from below.” I contend that while the Communist Party of the Philippines and the CPP-aligned “national democratic movement” remain the single biggest left force and still pose a threat to Philippine democracy, new left parties and groups that are democratically oriented have emerged and are helping to transform the Philippines’ elite-dominated democracy into a participatory and egalitarian one.

The early section of the dissertation focuses on the first two parts of my argument. The core chapters of the study deal with the Philippine left and its engagements in various arenas or lines of work – civil society, elections, public office and governance, popular political education, work for political reforms, and local work. These chapters expound on the third part of my argument, but they relate to the first two parts as well. The experiences of the left, particularly of the emergent left parties and groups, in the different arenas show the complexity of the contestation between “elite democracy” and “democracy from below,” and the problems and difficulties that were or are still being confronted by those working for the deepening of democracy in the Philippines. The complexity is such that in the different arenas, there are other clashing concepts and perspectives. I examine contending versions of the “civil society argument” and contending perspectives in governance – contentions that reflect the clash between the “harmony” and “conflict” models of power. Within the left itself, there are contending views on democratic institutions and processes, on governance, and others.

# Map of the Philippines

(With Regions and Provinces)



# Introduction

With the toppling of the Marcos dictatorship by “people power” – the “EDSA Revolution”<sup>1</sup> – in February 1986, the Philippines has been held up as a shining example of the restoration of democracy, part of the “third wave” of democratization in the late twentieth century. The Philippines’ “people power” is credited to have had a “demonstration effect” on other popular uprisings in Asia. The term “people power” itself has been added to the lexicon of “democratic revolutions” and has even become something of an international buzzword signifying “a peaceful, spontaneous popular revolt that topples an unbending dictatorship.”<sup>2</sup>

Despite the regular holding of elections since Marcos’ fall, however, many of the studies of Philippine politics since 1986 have tended to paint a not too democratic picture of the country or to qualify the Philippines’ democracy with a variety of depreciatory adjectives. Early on, post-dictatorship Philippines was already characterized as essentially being the return to pre-dictatorship “elite democracy”<sup>3</sup> or “cacique democracy.”<sup>4</sup> Since then, the Philippine political system has been described as one dominated by powerful political clans or families;<sup>5</sup> as a “weak state” captured or manipulated by strong social forces<sup>6</sup>; an “oligarchic democracy”<sup>7</sup>; a “patrimonial oligarchic state” preyed upon by a predatory elite<sup>8</sup>; a “clientelist electoral regime”<sup>9</sup>; and as one where “bossism” is a common phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> The Philippines has also been included in the list of the world’s

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<sup>1</sup> EDSA is the abbreviation for Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, the scene of the mammoth rallies during the “people power” upheavals of February 1986 and January 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Thompson 1995, p.1; Thompson 2004, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Hawes 1987; Nemenzo 1988; Bello and Gershman 1990; Stauffer 1990; Timberman 1991; Caoili 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson 1988. *Cacique*, a term of Spanish origin, refers to the privileged local class.

<sup>5</sup> Gutierrez, et al. 1992; McCoy 1993a.

<sup>6</sup> Miranda 1991; Rivera 1994; Villacorta 1994; May 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Hewison, Robison and Rodan 1993; Kingsbury 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Hutchcroft 1998a. In this study, I use Hutchcroft’s definition of *oligarchy*, derived from Aristotle: rule of the wealthy for their own benefit, not for the common good. I concur with his view that the Philippine oligarchy is “a social group that is based on wealth and that changes over time,” and is not just the established landed elite. (p. 22).

<sup>9</sup> Franco 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Sidel 1999.

“delegative democracies,”<sup>11</sup> “low-intensity democracies”<sup>12</sup> and “illiberal democracies.”<sup>13</sup> Even those who assess Philippine democracy as already being “consolidated” question its quality, acknowledging such serious and persistent problems as human rights violations, an unreformed social structure and political corruption.<sup>14</sup> In many of the studies, such features of the pre-martial law political system as patron-client relations,<sup>15</sup> elite politics<sup>16</sup> and the political machine<sup>17</sup> are acknowledged to have persisted or re-emerged.

The above characterizations cast doubt as to whether “rule by the people” truly prevails in the Philippines. Indeed, it is commonly said that the Philippines is ruled by a small number of powerful political families, who often resort to patronage or to the proverbial “guns, goons and gold” to maintain their hold on wealth and power. They dominate the country’s political parties, which are indistinguishable from one another in ideology and program and have weak membership bases. Elections focus on the candidates’ personalities, rather than on issues, and are often marred – or marked – by corruption, fraud and terrorism.

Politics in the Philippines has been regarded as so murky that ordinary Filipinos derogatorily refer to most politicians as *trapos*. A Filipino term of Spanish origin, *trapo* is an old rag which is used to wipe dirt from any surface and which ends up collecting all kinds of grime.<sup>18</sup> *Trapo* began to be used early on in the Aquino period as an acronym for “traditional politician”, i.e., a politician engaging in patronage, corruption, fraud or terrorism, especially those closely linked with oligarchic clans. Since the early 1990s, the term has become so widely used that many politicians have made great efforts to avoid getting tagged as such and to project themselves as being non-*trapo* or even anti-*trapo*.

In January 2001, it would have seemed that anti-*trapo* forces had scored a spectacular victory with the ouster of the corrupt “boss”-president, Joseph Estrada, through another awesome display of “people power” at EDSA. In her inaugural speech, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo stressed the need to outgrow “our traditional brand of politics based on patronage and personality”

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<sup>11</sup> O'Donnell 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Gills, et al. 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Zakaria 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson 1996, p. 197; Case 1999, pp. 469, 485. In Case 2002, p. 228, however, William Case changes his assessment: “[I]n falling short on a second dimension of quality, democracy in the Philippines, though stable, must be assessed as unconsolidated.”

<sup>15</sup> Landé 1965.

<sup>16</sup> Simbulan 1965.

<sup>17</sup> Scott 1969; Machado 1972.

<sup>18</sup> Constantino 1991, p. 6.

and to promote a politics of reform.<sup>19</sup> Quickly enough, however, it was back to *trapo* politics. Arroyo, the daughter of a former president, picked a Cabinet with many familiar faces from the Aquino and Ramos administrations, and mostly coming from powerful political families. Less than four months after “People Power II” (or “EDSA II”), Estrada’s supporters countered with their own show of force – “EDSA III” – and armed pro-Estrada followers even launched an attack on the presidential palace. The turbulent protest was easily quelled. In the May 2001 congressional and local elections, pro-Arroyo candidates won a majority of the seats. As usual, however, *trapos* – pro- and anti-administration – dominated the polls.

“Third wave” theorists have tended to present a rather simplistic or too upbeat assessment of democracy in the Philippines. Their many critics have been much more convincing in showing that Philippine democracy is no shining beacon, that it is still very much flawed and deficient. The series of astonishing events in the first half of 2001 and the failed military mutiny of July 2003 have raised doubts as to whether Philippine democracy is indeed already consolidated. Widespread poverty and grave social inequalities, and the continuing domination of the country’s politics by an oligarchic elite provide fertile ground for political dissent. Time and again, ultra-left, ultra-right and other extremist forces have tried to exploit the tensions and discord between the economic and political elite, on one hand, and the subordinate classes and marginalized sectors and communities, on the other, to try to topple the government through violent means.

Perhaps the only other scholars who sound somewhat optimistic about Philippine democracy are some of those who have been studying social movements, “people’s organizations” (POs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They cite the emergence of a “strong civil society” as manifested in vigorous social movements and the burgeoning of POs/NGOs as evidence of popular empowerment and the deepening of democracy in the Philippines.<sup>20</sup> Gerald Clarke argues that POs/NGOs have helped build “associative democracy” in the Philippines.<sup>21</sup> Jose Magadia shows that in “catalyzed” political situations, there is greater participation of “societal organizations” (i.e., POs/NGOs) in policy deliberations and greater interaction between state and societal

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<sup>19</sup> Inauguration speech of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at EDSA, 20 January 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Serrano 1993, Tigno 1993; Carroll 1997.

<sup>21</sup> Clarke 1998a, p. 201. *Associative democracy*, explains Clarke citing Paul Hirst, has two main features: “advocacy of a decentralized economy based on the non-capitalistic principles of cooperation and mutuality;” and “criticism of the centralized and sovereign state, with radical federalist and political pluralist ideas advanced as a substitute.”

organizations.<sup>22</sup> G. Sidney Silliman and Lela Garner Noble rightly point out, however, that what POs/NGOs have actually managed to do in Philippine politics is still quite limited – they have achieved only modest success in translating the “people’s agenda” into public policy, and they have not succeeded in electing any sizeable body of officials to provide genuine representation for ordinary Filipinos nor in bringing an end to the political domination of the predatory elite.<sup>23</sup>

If “third wave” and some “civil society” theorists may have somewhat drawn up an overly positive picture of democracy in the Philippines, many of their critics have tended to come up with appraisals that have sounded grim – perhaps too grim. From their analyses, it would seem that what goes on in the political scene simply revolves around, and depends on, the actions and machinations of the country’s oligarchic elite (or, as some maintain, of “imperialist” powers like the United States), that Philippine politics is nothing more than *trapo* politics, and that elections are, and will continue to be ruled by patronage and “guns, goons and gold.” Outside of the return to the ways of formal democracy, no further resonance from the “people power” so awesomely manifested in February 1986 and again in January 2001. Not much prospect for real political change, for the deepening of democracy.

This study deals with democratization and the left in the Philippines since the fall of Marcos in 1986. In this study, I start off with a critical review of the various interpretations of democracy and politics in the Philippines and I come up with an alternative interpretation. In the process of discussing this interpretation, I relate it to the process of the deepening of democracy in the post-Marcos period. I then proceed to a discussion of the Philippine left – specifically, communist, socialist and social democratic movements, parties, groups and currents – and its role in the democratization process. Since the left’s involvement in the anti-dictatorship struggle has already been well covered by other scholars, I touch on the left’s role in the “transition to democracy” phase only briefly and I concentrate on its part in the post-Marcos “deepening” of democracy. I devote special attention to the left’s participation in the state arena (i.e., the electoral struggle, working in public office and governance), an arena that it has long disdained as “bourgeois” or elite-controlled, and rejected.

How exactly is democracy – and politics, in general – in the Philippines to be characterized or interpreted? What is being done to deepen Philippine

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<sup>22</sup> Magadia 2003, pp. 4-5. Magadia defines political catalysis as “the process of accelerating state-society interaction as both state actors and societal actors send signals of willingness to engage each other in the development of policy.”

<sup>23</sup> Silliman and Noble 1998b, p. 306.

democracy and to rid it of the various depreciatory adjectives being appended to it? What role is the left playing in this process? Is the Philippine left a democratizing force or is it a threat to democracy?

In this study, I put forward a three-part argument. The first part consists of an alternative interpretative framework of Philippine politics. In the very first paragraph of this introduction, I presented different characterizations of politics in the Philippines that have been formulated since the fall of Marcos. Reviewing the various interpretations of Philippine politics in the *postcolonial* – not just post-Marcos – era, Benedict Kerkvliet argues that there are basically three prominent theoretical frameworks or interpretations of Philippine politics: the patron-client, factional framework, the elite-democracy or patrimonial view, and the neocolonial or dependency analysis.<sup>24</sup> After poring over the relevant literature, I noted that the three main interpretations tend to be somewhat static, one-sided and top-down. The “elite democracy” view, which I believe has now emerged as the dominant interpretation (with variations such as “cacique democracy,” “patrimonial oligarchic state” and “bossism”), tends to focus only on elite action and intra-elite competition, and to ignore the efforts and struggles for popular empowerment and social justice of major sections of subordinate classes and marginalized sectors – for “democracy from below.” As the first part of my argument, I contend that far from being simply an “elite democracy,” the Philippines is a *contested democracy*, in which the elite and the *trapos* strive to maintain a formal democracy with “free and fair” elections that they can easily manipulate and dominate, and in which large sections of the poor and marginalized classes, sectors and communities, and some sections of the middle and upper classes as well, work and fight for a participatory and egalitarian democracy.

Flowing from the first, the second part of my argument is that the deepening of democracy in the Philippines mainly involves the transformation of an elite-dominated formal democracy into a participatory and egalitarian one. In the sense that the elite strive to maintain the formal democracy of a truncated type and the poor and marginalized fight for a more substantive democracy, the process of the deepening of democracy takes on the character of a struggle of “democracy from below” versus “elite democracy.”

The third part of my argument has to do with the Philippine left – a political force that has long challenged elite rule and fought for social justice and popular empowerment. Since the late 1960s, the Philippine left has been

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<sup>24</sup> Kerkvliet 1995, pp. 401, 405-7; Kerkvliet 1996, pp. 136-7; Kerkvliet 2000, p. 390-1.

dominated by the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), and the CPP-aligned "national democratic" (ND) movement,<sup>25</sup> which have been engaged in a "protracted people's war" to overthrow the Philippine government. With the fall of Marcos and the restoration of democracy (albeit still elite-dominated) in 1986, the left, which had boycotted Marcos' manipulated elections, re-entered the electoral arena. Ever since, left groups have advocated a "new politics" to replace *trapo* politics. Because the CPP has continued waging its revolutionary war against the government, however, the Philippine left has widely been viewed as constituting more of a threat to democracy than a democratizing force. As the third part of my argument, I contend that while the CPP-NPA remains the single biggest left organization and still poses a threat to Philippine democracy, new left parties and groups that are democratically oriented have emerged and they are helping to deepen Philippine democracy, to transform it from an elite-dominated formal democracy into a participatory and egalitarian one. Getting into the thick of the struggle for "democracy from below," the new left groups have been striving to break the hegemony of the oligarchic elite in both civil society and the state arena, and have made small but important breakthroughs and gains. In working for the deepening of democracy in the Philippines, however, the emergent left forces are encountering great difficulties not only in fighting against, and avoiding getting entangled with, the patronage politics of the *trapos* but also in defending themselves from harassment and violence from the Maoist left.

In this study, I cover the *broad* Philippine left. During my fieldwork, I interviewed leaders and representatives as well as local activists of major left parties and POs/NGOs aligned with them. The party leaders and members I interviewed were mostly operating in the "aboveground" – the open, legal sphere – but there were also some working in the revolutionary underground. In this dissertation, I discuss developments about the two older and more established left parties in the Philippines – the CPP (and the open legal parties and groups aligned with it) and the social democratic *Partido Demokratiko Sosyalista ng Pilipinas* (PDSP) or Democratic Socialist Party of the Philippines. I devote more attention, however, to emergent left parties such as the "multi-tendency" Akbayan and the labor-based *Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas* (PMP or Filipino Workers' Party)<sup>26</sup> and organizations and groups linked with them. For a more in-depth analysis of left engagement in both civil society and the state

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<sup>25</sup> Nemenzo 1996b, p. 146; Weekley, p. 1.



arena, especially at the local level, I focus on Akbayan, which appears to have made significant gains in working, and combining its efforts, in both spheres.

### ***Concepts of Democracy***

The Philippines, according to its 1987 constitution, is “a democratic and republican State” in which “[s]overeignty resides in the people and all government authority emanates from them” (Article II, Section 1). This self-description is actually only a reiteration of what was already contained in the 1935 constitution, which provided for “a regime of justice, liberty and democracy” and “a republican state” (Preamble and Article II, Section 1). The 1935 charter served as the Philippines’ fundamental law upon independence in 1946 and was replaced by Marcos’ 1973 constitution.<sup>27</sup>

Democracy, in its classical meaning, is “rule by the people.” What this means in more concrete terms has long posed a dilemma. In 1943, in an effort to explain how it is technically possible for “people” to rule, Joseph Schumpeter came up with his path-breaking empirical and procedural definition of democracy, or more precisely the “democratic method,” as “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”<sup>28</sup> Schumpeter’s concept of democracy, which focused on the electoral competition for political leadership, contrasted with those of other scholars, which hewed closer to the classical concept and stressed popular participation in decision-making. “Democracy,” Carl Cohen wrote, “is that system of community government in which, by and large, the members of a community participate, or may participate, directly or indirectly, in the making of decisions which affect them all.”<sup>29</sup>

Through the years, Schumpeter’s minimalist, empirical concept virtually equating democracy with elections has proven very influential. Today it continues to have prominent adherents, e.g. the “third wave” theorists. Very much in the Schumpeterian tradition, Samuel Huntington asserts that free and fair elections are “the central procedure of democracy” and, in fact, “the essence of democracy, the inescapable sine qua non.” He defines a political system as

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<sup>26</sup> This is different from former President Estrada’s *Partido ng Masang Pilipino* (PMP or Party of the Filipino Masses).

<sup>27</sup> The 1973 constitution, which Marcos instated several months after declaring martial law, also contained the provisions on a regime of democracy and a republican state.

<sup>28</sup> Schumpeter 1943, p. 269.

<sup>29</sup> Cohen 1971, p. 7.

democratic “to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote.”<sup>30</sup>

Since the 1970s, other procedural concepts have emerged that define democracy more broadly. According to Robert Dahl, the “minimal” conditions for “polyarchy” or political democracy to exist are that “all full citizens must have unimpaired opportunities: (1) to formulate their preferences; (2) to signify their preferences to their fellow citizens and the government by individual and collective action; (3) to have their preferences weighed equally in the conduct of the government, that is, weighed with no discrimination because of the content or source of the preference.” These three opportunities, he adds, are dependent on certain institutional guarantees: freedom to form and join organizations; freedom of expression; right to vote; eligibility for public office; right of political leaders to compete for support; alternative sources of information; free and fair elections; and institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference.<sup>31</sup>

Proceeding from Dahl’s conditions and institutional guarantees for democracy, Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset define political democracy as a system of government that meets the following conditions: 1) meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and groups (especially political parties) for government positions, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; 2) a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies; and 3) a level of civil and political liberties – freedoms of expression, association, the press, etc. – sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation.<sup>32</sup> On the basis of this, Georg Sørensen summarizes the basic elements of political democracy as “competition, participation and civil and political liberties”.<sup>33</sup>

The concepts of Dahl and Diamond et al., are said to be “middle range” concepts of democracy. David Held puts forward a much broader and more comprehensive model of democracy that goes beyond procedural concerns to substantive and normative ones as well, and beyond the political realm to the social and economic realms. Held, who combines insights from classical democracy, republicanism, liberal democracy and Marxism, sees the “principle of

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<sup>30</sup> Huntington 1991, pp. 6-7, 9.

<sup>31</sup> Dahl 1971, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1988, p. xvi.

<sup>33</sup> Sørensen 1993, p. 12.

autonomy” as an essential premise of modern democracy. He defines the principle as follows:

[P]ersons should enjoy equal rights and, accordingly, equal obligations in the specification of the political framework which generates and limits the opportunities available to them; that is, they should be free and equal in the determination of the conditions of their own lives, so long as they do not deploy this framework to negate the rights of others.

The institutionalization of the principle of autonomy requires a process of “double democratization” – “the interdependent transformation of both state and civil society.” Held envisages a model of state and society called “democratic autonomy” or “liberal socialism,” whose features include, among others, the constitutional enshrinement of the principle of autonomy; a competitive party system (with active control of elected politicians); a broad bundle of social and economic rights apart from “state” (political) rights; direct participation in local community institutions; and a combination of self-managed, socially-owned or -regulated enterprises and diverse forms of private enterprise.<sup>34</sup>

In this study on democratization and the left in the Philippines, I make extensive use of two conceptualizations of democracy that emphasize a key theme of the left – equality – and that attempt to bridge the short-, middle- and long-range models of democracy. The first comes from the Marxist tradition and the second, non-Marxist. Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, avowed post-Marxists (“without apologies”),<sup>35</sup> advance the concept of *radical and plural democracy*, which they view as the deepening of the democratic revolution, the extension of “the two great themes of the democratic imaginary – equality and liberty” to more and more social spheres. Laclau and Mouffe do not reject liberal democracy but advocate a type of “radical liberal democracy,” one that seeks “to use the symbolic resources of the liberal democratic tradition to struggle against relations of subordination not only in the economy but also those linked to gender, race, or sexual orientation, for example.”<sup>36</sup> Balancing the demand for equality, the demand for liberty finds expression in *pluralism*, which Mouffe defines as “the principle that individuals should have the possibility to organize their lives as they wish, to choose their own ends, and to realize them as they think best.”<sup>37</sup> Laclau and Mouffe are for socialism as they still see the need to

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<sup>34</sup> Held 1996, pp. 295-334.

<sup>35</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 1987, p. 79.

<sup>36</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 1985, pp. 164, 167, 184; Mouffe 1996, p. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Mouffe 1996, p. 20.

eradicate oppressive capitalist relations of production. Mouffe declares: “Understood as a process of democratization of the economy, socialism is a necessary component of the project of radical and plural democracy.” Unlike the traditional left, however, they view socialism not as the main goal, but only as one of the components of the radical democratic project.<sup>38</sup>

I also make use of some ideas on democracy of Evelyne Huber, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and John D. Stephens, whose writings on capitalist development and democracy in advanced capitalist countries, Latin America and the Caribbean are in the fine tradition of Max Weber and Barrington Moore. Huber et al. present three types of democracy: formal, participatory and social. By *formal democracy*, they mean a political system that combines four features: regular free and fair elections, universal suffrage, accountability of the state’s administrative organs to the elected representatives, and effective guarantees for freedom of expression and association as well as protection from arbitrary state action. Huber et al. hold that formal democracy is valuable not only in its own right but also, and more importantly, in that it tends to be more than merely formal – it makes deepening towards more fully participatory democracy and progress towards increasing social and economic equality possible. *Participatory democracy* is a political system that meets the four criteria of formal democracy plus a fifth: high levels of participation without systematic differences across social categories (e.g., class, ethnicity and gender). *Social democracy* includes a sixth criterion: increasing equality in social and economic outcomes.<sup>39</sup>

The models of democracy advanced by Laclau and Mouffe and by Huber et al. are similar in that they both accept liberal democracy, view the deepening of democracy in terms of moving from liberal democracy to a more egalitarian order (not just on the basis of class), and integrate socialism in, and subsume it to, the new democratic system. The two models differ in that Laclau and Mouffe’s model devotes special attention to pluralism, while Huber et al.’s stress popular participation. As I will show in coming chapters, the two themes – pluralism and popular participation – have particular relevance to the left and the democratization process in the Philippines. The issue of pluralism figured prominently in the debates within the left after the collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and in the “re-visioning” of an alternative society by the emergent left groups. In their endeavors to deepen

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<sup>38</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 1985, p. 178; Mouffe 1993, p. 90.

<sup>39</sup> Huber et al. 1997, pp. 323-325. Huber et al. clarify that their concept of “social democracy” does not refer specifically to the European political movement bearing the same name (p. 340).

democracy in the Philippines, the new left groups and allied POs/NGOs have been promoting people's participation in development and in governance.

As Philip Green succinctly puts it, democracy is a contested idea.<sup>40</sup> This can already be gleaned from the differing concepts of democracy already presented. Perhaps the sharpest clash has been between Schumpeter's minimalist model and the "long-range" models. Taking Schumpeter's side, Huntington argues that defining democracy in terms of source of authority or purposes, or of such ideals as *liberté*, *égalité* and *fraternité* gives rise to serious problems of ambiguity and imprecision, and that only Schumpeter's procedural definition provides analytical precision and empirical referents. "Fuzzy norms," he quips, "do not yield useful analysis."<sup>41</sup> Held criticizes Schumpeter for reducing democracy to being merely an institutional arrangement for generating and legitimating leadership, with only a tenuous relation to "rule by the people". In Held's view, Schumpeter's democratic system is a competitive elitist model where political elites in parties and in public offices are the only full participants. Political participation of the masses is largely restricted to voting, since they are regarded as being unable to form reasonable judgments about pressing political questions. The Schumpeterian model, writes Held, is but one small step removed from an anti-liberal and anti-democratic "technocratic vision," which holds that all the people need to govern them are "engineers" capable of making the right technical decisions.<sup>42</sup>

### ***On the Consolidation and Deepening of Democracy***

It is useful, writes Guillermo O'Donnell, to conceptualize the processes of democratization as actually implying two transitions: first, the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic government, and second, the transition from this government to the consolidation of democracy.<sup>43</sup> An influential concept of democratic consolidation is that of Juan Linz who describes a *consolidated democracy* as "one in which none of the major political actors, parties, or organized interests, forces, or institutions consider that there is any alternative to democratic processes to gain power, and that no political institution or group has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision-makers." To put it

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<sup>40</sup> Green 1993, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Huntington 1991, pp. 6, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Held 1996, pp. 177-198.

<sup>43</sup> O'Donnell 1992, p. 18.

simply, democracy must be seen as the “only game in town”.<sup>44</sup> Andreas Schedler observes that countless other “tasks” or “conditions” of democratic consolidation have since been added to the original mission of making democracy the only game in town. He lists such divergent items as: popular legitimation, the diffusion of democratic values, the neutralization of antisystem actors, civilian supremacy over the military, the elimination of authoritarian enclaves, party building, the organization of functional interests, the stabilization of electoral rules, the routinization of politics, the decentralization of state power, the introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, judicial reform, the alleviation of poverty, and economic stabilization.<sup>45</sup> For this study, Linz’s modest concept suffices.

Viewed in Linz’s terms, democratic consolidation, although certainly a worthy objective, is perhaps a much too limited one. As mentioned earlier, some scholars who regard Philippine democracy as already being consolidated question the quality of this democracy, citing grave problems of corruption, human rights abuses and an inequitable social structure. Indeed, even a country where democracy is already generally perceived as the only game in town could still very well be, to borrow from Huber et al., a “deficient” formal democracy.

Huber et al. classify the new democracies of Latin America as formal democracies – in that they meet the criteria of free and fair elections and universal suffrage – but clarify that many of them are “truncated” or “deficient forms” of formal democracy, falling short in other criteria. The Latin American democracies suffer from weak accountability due to powerful presidents and weak legislatures and judiciaries; uneven protection of civil and political rights; and patrimonial practices. Huber et al warn of the possibility of a vicious cycle in which inegalitarian policies in new democracies could lead to poverty, marginalization and crime, and to “demobilization, the corrosion of judicial and civil rights, and a ‘delegative democracy’ that sharply reduces the accountability of the government.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Linz 1990, p. 158.

<sup>45</sup> Schedler 1998, pp. 91-2.

<sup>46</sup> Huber et al. 1997, pp. 323-4, 330. By delegative democracy, O’Donnell refers to newly installed democracies which meet Dahl’s criteria for polyarchy, but which, instead of becoming consolidated representative democracies, have stalled in a feeble, uncertain situation. In a delegative democracy, the elected president, as the embodiment of the nation, is deemed entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, and other institutions – e.g., the legislature and the courts – are seen as mere obstacles to the full power that the executive has been delegated to exercise. Although the president is subject to vertical accountability through the ballot box, horizontal accountability is weak, in the sense that it is difficult for other state institutions to call him into question and punish him for abuses or wrongdoings in carrying out his functions. (O’Donnell 1992, pp. 55-6, 59-61.)

A protracted period of widespread poverty, grave disparities and social discontent is apt to provide opportunities for anti-democratic elements to mount a significant challenge against the government. A process of “deepening” democracy is essential, even if only to prevent a consolidated democracy, particularly a deficient formal one, from turning or lurching back into an unstable condition – or from being overthrown. As pointed out earlier, Laclau and Mouffe and Huber et al. view the deepening of democracy as consisting of a movement from formal liberal democracy to a more egalitarian one – a radical and plural democracy, or a participatory and social democracy, respectively.

As in the transition to democracy, the deepening of democracy involves contestation. In their studies of capitalist development and democracy, Huber et al. put conflict among different classes and class coalitions at the very core of the democratization dynamics – in both the processes of achieving formal democracy and of moving towards greater social and economic equality. In advanced capitalist countries, Latin America and the Caribbean, democratization was both pushed forward and opposed by class interest – on the whole, subordinate classes fought for democracy and classes benefiting from the status quo (especially the landlord class) resisted democracy. Huber et al. dispute the orthodox Marxist and liberal social science notion that the bourgeoisie are the primary agent of democracy, showing how capitalists often supported competitive elections and parliamentary government but rarely pushed for full democracy. While asserting the centrality of class power to the process of democratization, Huber et al. also stress that this has to be seen in the larger context of three clusters of power – the balance of class power itself, the structure of the state and of state-society relations, and international power structures. These three factors combine and interact in various ways in shaping political developments, including promoting, slowing down or obstructing the democratization process.<sup>47</sup>

Strongly influenced by Antonio Gramsci’s ideas on hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe see the deepening of democracy and the attainment of radical and plural democracy as basically consisting of a struggle for hegemony of popular forces against conservative reaction, particularly the “new right.” Laclau and Mouffe envisage the formation of a new historic bloc that brings together a broad range of groups fighting for liberty and equality in different social categories. Within such a bloc, they see the emergence of a new collective will articulating the democratic demands of the different groups. The “expansive hegemony” respects

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<sup>47</sup> Rueschemeyer, et al. 1992, pp. 46, 269-271; Huber, et al. 1997, p. 323.

the autonomy and specificity of the different democratic struggles, with no single struggle being privileged over others.<sup>48</sup> On the means for achieving radical and plural democracy, Laclau and Mouffe reject the classic Jacobin – and traditional Marxist – concept of revolution, which they believe privileges “one foundational moment of rupture” and “the confluence of struggles into a unified political space” and is thus incompatible with the plurality that the new political imaginary recognizes. They emphasize instead “the *process* character of every radical transformation – the revolutionary act is, simply, an internal moment of the process.”<sup>49</sup>

Spelling out the role of the left in the deepening of democracy, Laclau and Mouffe advise: “In the face of the project [of the ‘new right’] for the reconstruction of a hierarchic society, the alternative of the Left should consist of locating itself fully in the field of the democratic revolution and expanding the chains of equivalents between the different struggles against oppression.” The hegemonic strategy of the left, they add, resides “not in the abandonment of the democratic terrain but, on the contrary, in the extension of the field of democratic struggles to the whole of civil society and the state.”<sup>50</sup>

The ideas of Huber et al. and Laclau and Mouffe on social contestation in the democratization process, especially in the deepening aspect, are highly relevant to the Philippines. As will be shown in coming chapters, Huber et alia’s thesis on class conflict – subordinate classes fighting for, and dominant classes resisting, full democracy (i.e., democracy that is participatory and egalitarian, not just formal) – holds true for the Philippines as well. Laclau and Mouffe’s post-Gramscian ideas on the hegemonic struggle seem to find expression in the efforts of organizations and groups with different democratic demands (not just based on class, but also on gender, ethnicity, social sector, etc.) to join forces in a struggle against the rule of the oligarchic elite. No longer dismissing liberal democratic processes and institutions as fake or “bourgeois,” some emergent left parties and groups have located themselves fully in the democratic struggles and are working towards the creation of a new popular hegemonic bloc. Rejecting the Jacobin and traditional Marxist concept of revolution, they look at radical transformation not – or no longer – as a single foundational moment of rupture but as a process with both slow changes and ruptures.

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<sup>48</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 1985, pp. 72, 171-6; Mouffe 1988; pp. 103-4. Laclau and Mouffe use Gramsci’s “collective will” only in a metaphoric way. They reject the notions of a vanguard party and a vanguard class in Gramsci’s concept. Besides, as Mouffe explains, “collective will,” like Rousseau’s “general will,” can imply too much homogeneity.

<sup>49</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 1985, pp. 152, 177-78. Underscoring authors’.

<sup>50</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 1985, p. 176.



That democracy is contested in both meaning and substance is at the heart of the concept of “contested democracy” that I put forward. I look at the contest over democracy, however, not so much in terms of either one or the other concept, e.g., either the minimalist or the broad-range model. Informed by the “bridging” concepts of democracy of Laclau and Mouffe and of Huber et al., I view the contest more as a struggle between those who want to let a new (or newly-restored) democracy remain a formal – and truncated – liberal democracy and those who want to extend and deepen democracy and transform formal liberal democracy into a more participatory and egalitarian one. In the sense that the Philippine elite seeks to maintain a deficient form of formal democracy in which they dominate, and major sections of the subordinate classes and communities demand a more participatory and egalitarian one, the contest over democracy becomes one between “elite democracy” and “democracy from below.”

In this dissertation, democracy is by no means the only concept tackled whose meaning or substance is disputed. I actually came up with the idea of “contested democracy” when I read Kerkvliet’s article, “Contested Meanings of Elections in the Philippines,” in which he states that in the Philippines, “the meaning and purpose of elections are contested.”<sup>51</sup> I touch on his article briefly in Chapter IV. “Contested democracy” is, of course, part of my discussion on contending interpretations of Philippine politics. I also bring up and examine contending versions of the “civil society argument” and contending perspectives in governance – contentions that reflect the clash between the “harmony” and “conflict” models of power. Within the left itself, there are contending views on democratic processes and institutions, as well as contending views on governance.

### ***Overview of the Study***

Chapter I discusses the various characterizations and interpretations of Philippine politics. After presenting a brief summary of Kerkvliet’s three prominent theoretical frameworks of Philippine politics (the patron-client, factional framework, the elite-democracy or patrimonial view, and the neocolonial or dependency analysis), the chapter traces their historical development and their periods of relative hegemony, and analyzes why one framework gained ascendancy over the others over a given period. I propound

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<sup>51</sup> Kerkvliet 1996, p. 137.

that the patron-client model was predominant in the pre-authoritarian era; the neocolonial or dependency perspective, in the authoritarian period; and the elite-democracy or patrimonial view, in the post-authoritarian era. Post-Marcos interpretations, such as “cacique democracy,” “oligarchic democracy,” “patrimonial oligarchic state,” a “weak state” captured by powerful political families, and “bossism,” are mostly variations of the “elite democracy” theme. The main failing of the three prominent frameworks, I argue, is their one-sided, top-down view of Philippine politics. In the last part of the chapter, I present the case for an alternative interpretative framework of Philippine politics – contested democracy.

An overview of the Philippine left and its role in the democratization process is given in Chapter II. It begins with a brief definition of “left” in the Philippine context. Before presenting the spectrum of left parties and groups, the chapter presents a historical review of the left in the Philippines, with special attention to the left’s part in the anti-Marcos dictatorship struggle. I then tackle the changing views within the left regarding democracy. Following in the footsteps of its counterparts in Latin America, the Philippine left has been moving from an outright rejection of “bourgeois” democratic processes and institutions – elections, legislature, etc. – to an instrumental view of these processes and finally, for a part of the left at least, to an integral view of democracy. In analyzing the Philippine left’s record vis-à-vis democratization, I contend that the CPP was and still is a threat to democracy rather than a democratizing force. Here I take issue with some scholars’ overly positive appraisal of the left’s contribution in building a strong civil society, showing how the CPP’s instrumental view of democracy extends to its view of civil society. Towards the end of the chapter, I discuss the emergence of a democratic left alternative, together with its advocacy of a non-ND “new politics.” In my examination of the Philippine left, I sometimes draw from my own experience of having been a very active participant of it – 22 years in the ND movement (1970-1992), the last twenty as a member of the CPP.

Succeeding chapters elaborate on how the parties and groups of the left, especially the emerging ones, are doing battle with elite rule and *trapo* politics. As these chapters will show, the new left groups are in the thick of the fight for popular empowerment and social justice. Their battle against the *trapos* can be viewed as part of the larger contest between elite democracy and “democracy from below.”

Chapter III focuses on the engagement of emergent left parties and groups in civil society, an arena in which the Philippine left has been strong, particularly in building POs/NGOs and promoting social movements. Apart from keeping up with the left tradition of active involvement in contentious politics, the new left groups have also gone deep into development work. Early on, some of the new left groups, influenced by Gramsci's ideas, already characterized civil society as an arena of ideological and cultural struggle against the hegemonic elite. During their engagement in civil society, however, the emergent left parties have had to grapple with different versions of the "civil society argument" vis-à-vis democratization. Most influential in the Philippines (as in many other countries) have been *associational civil society*, which underscores the need for a strong and vibrant civil society in promoting and strengthening democracy; and *counterweight civil society*, which views civil society as a counter-force to a repressive state. The new left groups have come to realize that both associational and counterweight versions have major weaknesses. Both, for instance, tend to gloss over grave social disparities and tensions, and to undervalue political organizations, especially parties. Associational civil society, in fact, promotes a "harmony" or consensual model of politics. A new left party, Akbayan, now pursues a post-Gramscian version of the "civil society argument," which I call *hegemonic civil society*. It views the deepening of democracy as coming about not really through "strengthening" civil society, but through contestation *within* civil society – a struggle of subordinate classes and marginalized groups against elite hegemony in civil society.

Contestation is not only in the arena of civil society, of course, but also in the state arena – elections, public office and governance. In Chapter IV, I deal mainly with the left's changing moods and behavior vis-à-vis elections, going into more detail about post-Marcos elections. I discuss the left's boycotts of Marcos' elections. Contrary to claims of the left's long-standing aversion to electoral politics, however, I show that the left participated actively in elections in the 1930s and 40s. Ever since the 1986 boycott fiasco, no left party or group has called for boycotting "bourgeois" elections again. The left's stance on elections is by no means settled. The dividing line is no longer between boycott and participation. Now it is between an instrumental view and an integral view of democracy. The lack of unity within ND ranks on this point contributed to the defeat of the NDs' electoral party in the first post-Marcos elections in 1987 and its lackluster performance in the 1988 and 1992 elections. After the CPP split in 1992-93, new left parties and groups explored possibilities for entering the

electoral arena. In 1998, several of these groups, mostly with an integral view of democracy, made a breakthrough, winning seats in the lower house of Congress through the party-list ballot and also scoring small victories in the local elections. In 2001, the NDs, still holding on to an instrumentalist view of elections, fielded candidates under *Bayan Muna* (The People First), which topped the party-list vote. The emergent left parties like Akbayan and the PMP-aligned *Partido ng Manggagawa* (PM or Workers' Party) have had to contend with the patronage, fraud and violence of *trapos* and with harassment and intimidation from the CPP-NPA. After its modest gains in 1998 and 2001, Akbayan appears to have adopted an electoral strategy inspired by the Latin American left experience of building up strength from victories in local elections, then slowly moving up to the national level.

Winning in elections has been very difficult for Philippine left parties and groups, but public office and governance have proven to be an even bigger challenge. Chapter V traces the development of the left's involvement in government work and in governance. In the early post-Marcos years, public officials who belonged to left parties or groups were largely left to their own devices in planning out and performing their government functions. Such a failing on the part of the left groups appears to have been rectified only in the last seven years or so. Conflicting views on democracy (i.e., instrumental versus institutional) have affected the left's stance towards public office and governance, as towards elections. Apart from delving into the work of left parties in Congress, in some sections of the executive branch, and in local governments, I examine their response to two important developments: coalition politics and government decentralization. Special attention is given to a program in participatory local governance that Akbayan, together with allied POs/NGOs, has undertaken, following decentralization, to promote efficient, accountable government and popular empowerment. Lastly, I present different strategic perspectives in government work and governance. The new left's emerging radical democratic model is contending not just with the *trapos*' "patrimonial" approach, but also with other alternative models – the "revolutionary approach" of the far left and the revised neoliberal perspective of the "new" right. The revisionist neoliberals, who propagate World Bank-style "good governance" and "new public management," have not really challenged oligarchic rule and are, in fact, working in unholy cohabitation with the *trapos*. The new left groups are fighting an uphill battle as the new managerialists dominate the governance discourse in the public sector, business and civil society, including the academe.

Chapter VI deals with two special areas of concern for the emergent left parties and groups: popular political education and working for political reform. The new left groups wage a counter-hegemonic struggle against the elite not just through mass protest actions, development work, elections and “progressive good governance,” but also in the ideological and cultural sphere – by promoting popular political education or “pop-ed.” I trace the development of efforts in “raising the masses’ political consciousness” through “pop-ed.” Despite the shift of some groups from the traditional teacher-student approach to Freire’s dialogical pedagogy, the “pop-ed” initiatives of the new left groups appear not to have had much impact yet in countering the pervasive influence of *trapo* political culture. In pushing for political reform, the emergent left parties now work not just in the “parliament of the streets” but also right inside Congress. The specific reforms that the new left has advocated have been geared mainly towards promoting greater popular participation and empowerment (e.g., the party-list system, voting rights for overseas Filipinos and sectoral representation in local legislative bodies), preventing *trapo* tricks (election automation) and weakening the hold of the oligarchic elite in Philippine politics (a ban on political dynasties). Some of the new left parties also favor certain major reforms that require constitutional amendment, such as shifts to a parliamentary system of government, to proportional representation and to federalism – reforms that they believe would help break up elite hegemony in politics and facilitate popular empowerment. The new left groups, however, have opposed moves of *trapos* for amending the constitution, seeing such moves as being self-serving and helping to mobilize massive popular opposition to them.

In Chapter VII, I examine the political work of Akbayan at the local level, studying how it builds a politico-electoral base in a municipality or city. I delve into Akbayan’s ways of opening new areas for expansion; the engagement of local party units in civil society and in the state arena; and the establishment and strengthening of local party units. In my fieldwork, I discovered that although Akbayan has come from the “mass movement” tradition, local party members, especially in the rural areas, have actually been paying more attention to local governance, development work and preparing for elections. I also found that the involvement of Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs in development programs has contributed immensely to the deepening of their involvement in local governance, and that, in fact, their engagement in development work and in local governance has converged. While Akbayan has found ways to thwart various forms of *trapo* dirty tricks during elections, it still has not devised effective

means to counter vote-buying and NPA harassment. Caught up in myriad engagements, local Akbayan activists have at times failed to give adequate attention to consolidating the local party organization. At the end of the chapter, I come up with a schematic presentation of Akbayan's local intervention, showing how Akbayan leaders envisage the dislodging of *trapo* bailiwicks by "bailiwicks of new politics."

The conclusion reviews the major points discussed in the previous chapters in relation to the three-part argument I presented at the outset. These have mainly to do with the complexities of contested democracy and of the democratization of the left itself. I then put the Philippines' contested democracy and the emergent left's role in democratization in comparative perspective. Finally, I look into the prospects for the transformation of the Philippines elite-dominated formal democracy into a participatory and egalitarian democracy, as well as the prospects for the new left parties and groups as agents for change.

## ***Chapter I***

# **Contested Democracy: An Alternative Interpretation of Philippine Politics**

According to Kerkvliet, there are basically three prominent theoretical frameworks or interpretations of Philippine politics: the patron-client, factional framework, the elite-democracy or patrimonial view, and the neocolonial or dependency analysis. The *patron-client interpretation*, which has long been regarded as being the most influential, holds that Philippine politics is “about personal relations and networks linked by kinship, friendship, exchange of favors, influence, and money.” The *elite-democracy* or *patrimonial view* argues that the Philippine political system, despite having formal democratic institutions, is essentially run by an elite few who use their wealth and power to control the country’s resources. Public office serves as a means for the elite to enrich themselves. While acknowledging the persistence of patron-client ties, the patrimonial/elite-democracy analysis regards intimidation, coercion and violence as also widespread. The *neocolonial* or *dependency* framework shares much of the elite-democracy view, but sees the Filipino elite’s power as limited and foreign interests as actually dominating the country. Kerkvliet does not delve into the historical development of the three frameworks. While admitting that he had found the three interpretative frameworks useful, Kerkvliet expresses a certain amount of dissatisfaction, saying that a great deal of the country’s politics tended to be left out of one or all three. He presented several domains of Philippine political life – elections, politicians, political movements and everyday politics – in which values, motivations, aspirations and relationships could not be adequately explained by the three interpretations.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I trace the historical development of the patron-client, neocolonial and elite-democracy frameworks, presenting the variations in each.

In my view, the three frameworks are historically imbedded. Each of the three had a period of relative hegemony, the periods roughly corresponding with three important phases in Philippine postcolonial history: the pre-authoritarian, authoritarian and post-authoritarian periods. I explain why one framework gained ascendancy over the others and how the frameworks accounted – or failed to account – for regime change, i.e., from democratic to authoritarian regime or vice-versa. Not all the frameworks and their variants make a clear distinction between political system, state and regime, but I point out the distinctions when these have been made. I show the main weakness of the three frameworks: their one-sided, top-down view of Philippine politics. I then present an alternative interpretation of Philippine politics, which I am denoting as the “contested democracy” framework. *Contested democracy* is the combination of the elite-democracy interpretation, which I believe is now the dominant interpretation, with a “popular empowerment” or “democracy from below” element. In the Philippines, it is not just elections whose meaning is contested, but also, and more importantly, the meaning and substance of democracy itself. For the country’s ruling elite, democracy has to do mainly with elections – a formal democratic exercise that they can easily use and manipulate for selfish ends. Major sections of the country’s subordinate classes and marginalized communities and groups as well as some sections of the upper classes, however, want democracy to mean greater popular participation in decision-making and social and economic equality. Elite-democracy and “democracy from below” are currently the two major competing strands in Philippine politics. They are, in a sense, opposites, but the outcome of the contest need not mean a complete wiping out of one by the other nor a regression to authoritarianism. Formal democracy, erstwhile deficient due to its “elite” character, can be deepened into a more participatory and egalitarian democracy.

### ***The Patron-Client, Factional Framework***

The seminal work on the patron-client, factional framework is Carl Landé’s now classic *Leaders, Factions, and Parties: The Structure of Philippine Politics*. It came out at a time when social scientists of various disciplines devoted considerable attention to patron-client structures, with case studies of clientelist forms and dynamics in different world regions but especially in Latin America,

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<sup>1</sup> Kerkvliet 1995; Kerkvliet 1996.



Southeast Asia and Southern Europe.<sup>2</sup> Landé observed that the Philippines' two major political parties (the Nacionalista and Liberal parties) were identical in policies, ideological position and sources of support, that intra-party solidarity was weak and that inter-party switching was endemic. He found that the Philippine polity, unlike those of Western democracies, was structured less by organized interest groups than by networks of personal ties – to a great extent, dyadic ties involving exchanges of favors between prosperous patrons and their poor and dependent clients. In each province, the two main parties were structured by vertical chains of patron-client relationships extending from wealthy, landed political leaders at the provincial level, down to lesser gentry politicians in the towns, down further to village leaders and finally to ordinary peasants. As national entities, the two parties were actually organized upward: leaders of personal followings at the village and town level clustered together into competing provincial factions, which in turn formed the building blocks of the national parties. The parties took on “the role of general benefactor, offering to every sort of individual some limited but tangible reward ... and rewarding each town which supported them with some visible public works project.” In Landé's view, Philippine parties could not be dismissed simply as parties of the upper class. He stressed the multi-class character of the two parties, saying that they satisfied most of the needs of members of all social strata. He also pointed out the parties' multi-ethnic and multicultural character, as each drew politicians from all of the islands, whose constituencies included voters representing every type of linguistic or religious minority.<sup>3</sup>

Landé's study on the patron-client framework actually drew from and belonged to a series of studies, largely employing the anthropological approach, which emphasized the element of personalism in Philippine politics. Landé gained insights on the nature of patron-client relationships and on the multifunctional character of local factions from Frank Lynch and Mary Hollnsteiner respectively. Lynch described the relationship between the upper and lower classes – how the former were expected to sponsor community activities, to lend money during times of scarcity, to intercede in dealings with government officials, i.e., to play the role of “big people” to the “little people,” and how the latter, in turn, were expected to reciprocate in terms of services and loyalty.<sup>4</sup> Hollnsteiner developed Lynch's concept of the “alliance system,” depicting a more extensive network of reciprocal relationships. According to her,

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<sup>2</sup> See Schmidt et al. 1977.

<sup>3</sup> Landé 1965; Landé 1967; Landé 1968.

four basic social relationships result from or culminate in the structuring of an alliance system: kinship, *compadrazgo* (ritual kinship), reciprocal obligations or services, and associational ties. Hollnsteiner drew special attention to the concepts of *utang na loob* and *hiya* as moral forces in the regulation of behavior.<sup>5</sup>

Jean Grossholtz also pursued the theme of the heavy weight of personalism. In the Philippines, she wrote, “politics is bargaining.” Filipinos are integrated into the Philippine political system as individuals – not groups – and through highly personal bargaining mechanisms. The political process involves continuous bargaining between barrio leaders and provincial and municipal officeholders, between local politicians and national officeholders, and among congressional politicians and the President. Philippine political parties build a coalition of personalities on the basis of highly particular and personal considerations. Because they are based on personalities, the parties are in a constant state of flux. Thus, little in the way of a stable, distinctive program of government policies is possible.<sup>6</sup>

Many scholars, journalists, diplomats and other observers adopted Landé’s patron-client interpretation of Philippine politics. His work on patron-client relationships in the Philippines figured prominently in the international scholarly literature on clientelism.<sup>7</sup> Largely on the basis of his work on the patron-client, factional model, Landé has been cited as being “[p]erhaps the most influential student of Philippine politics in the last four decades.”<sup>8</sup> As late as 2001, it was still being said that Landé’s patron-client framework enjoyed hegemonic status in Philippine political studies.<sup>9</sup> The period over which it held hegemonic status in the Philippines, however, is actually much shorter than commonly believed. As one scholar rightly put it, the patron-client model built by Landé was the rather widely accepted model of *pre-martial law* Philippines politics.<sup>10</sup>

By the end of the 1960s, the inadequacies of the patron-client framework began to become apparent. In his study of Philippine elections in 1946-69, Hirofumi Ando found that while the electoral process basically conformed to the patron-client model, material resources and rewards had become “too diffusedly

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<sup>4</sup> Lynch 1959.

<sup>5</sup> Hollnsteiner 1963. According to Hollnsteiner, *utang na loob* may roughly be translated as “debt of gratitude” or “sense of gratitude,” while *hiya* embraces the feelings of shame, embarrassment, guilt and shyness.

<sup>6</sup> Grossholtz 1964.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Schmidt et al. 1977.

<sup>8</sup> Rocamora 1998, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Iletto 2001, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Doronila 1984, p. 99.

distributed” and many members of the elite could no longer meet the voters’ demands through remunerative means alone. He noted a serious mutation in the compliance system: the threat or use of physical violence – a feature supposed to be alien to the patron-client model.<sup>11</sup> With increasing intra-elite competition, politicians hired more and more “private security guards.” Political warlords emerged with their private armies. Ando also observed the use of fraud, such as the falsification of election returns. He predicted that the trend of using coercive means to secure mass electoral support would gradually modify, if not destroy, the Philippine electoral process.<sup>12</sup>

Studies of other scholars tended to show that Landé’s model itself was becoming outdated. James Scott and Kit Machado argued that traditional patron-client relationships were eroding and that the traditional faction based on patron-client bonds was being transformed into the *political machine*, a form of political organization common in the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> Scott defined the machine as “a non-ideological organization interested less in political principle than in securing and holding office for its leaders and distributing income to those who run it and work for it.” Instead of relying on traditional patterns of deference, the machine resorted to widespread use of concrete, short-run, material inducements to secure cooperation. Occasionally, the machine “boss” also used charisma, coercion or ideology to get his bidding. To generate broad support on a continuing basis, machine parties wielded patronage on a distinctive scale. Graft for party funds, help with the law and selective non-enforcement became, like patronage, part of the bundle of short-run inducements.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to Landé’s somewhat benign characterization of Philippine clientelist politics, Scott thus highlighted the corruption engendered by Philippine machine politics. On the basis of the empirical experience of the U.S., England and new nations, however, Scott predicted that the party loyalty ties that had moved from deferential vertical ties (patron-client ties) to ties based on particularistic, material rewards (political machine) would eventually move

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<sup>11</sup> Ando cited John Duncan Powell who stated in Powell 1970, p. 412: “*It is important to note that patron-client ties clearly are different from other ties which might bind parties unequal in status and proximate in time and space, but which do not rest on the reciprocal exchange of mutually valued goods and services – such as relationships based on coercion, authority, manipulation, and so forth.*” (Italics Powell’s.)

<sup>12</sup> Ando 1971.

<sup>13</sup> Scott’s studies 1969 and 1972b were not specifically on the Philippines, but he cited the Philippines extensively. In another study, Scott 1972a acknowledged, somewhat contradictorily, the continued vitality of patron-client ties in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines.

<sup>14</sup> Scott 1969.

further on to horizontal ties based on inducements stressing policy concerns or ideology.<sup>15</sup>

Apparently influenced by modernization theory, Machado perceived the rise of the political machine as “a common political response to change in societies that are in early stages of modernization and that are following the democratic pattern of political development.” In his study of Philippine local politics, Machado linked the emergence of the political machine in the country to two other important changes: the replacement of notables from old leading families in positions of leadership by upwardly mobile “new men” from humble backgrounds, and the adoption of more professional criteria for recruitment to such positions. According to him, these changes occurred most strikingly in areas of rapid social mobilization and low concentration of landownership. For Machado, the emergence of the “new men” and the professionalization of local political roles offered great potential for the democratization of Philippine towns and the eventual stabilization of party organization in the country.<sup>16</sup>

Defending the patron-client model, Thomas Nowak and Kay Snyder maintained that the organization of Philippine politics had not changed in basic structural characteristics and that it remained strongly clientelist-oriented even in the cities. Defining clientelist politics as “a system of exchange which is particularistic, non-programmatic, and non-ideological,” they argued that the political machine was merely a more specialized form of clientelist politics that had evolved in response to increased differentiation and growth of urban areas.<sup>17</sup>

In a study of the 1969 presidential elections, Arthur Alan Shantz traced the roots of Philippine political parties not to patron-client bonds, but, perhaps influenced by Hollnsteiner, to “kinship and fictive kinship systems of allegiance” and such Filipino traits as *pakisama*<sup>18</sup> and *utang na loob*. Philippine parties were two vast national coalitions of local political organizations, bound together by the vertical hierarchy of public offices and their rewards and the social hierarchy of wealth. They were composed of and based on the dominant families of the barrio, whose favor, patronage and size united the barrio in its relations with outsiders. Shantz observed that traditional patron-client modes of organization centered

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. In this regard, Remigio Agpalo's study on “*pandanggo-sa-ilaw* politics” has been likened to Scott's discussion of machine politics. See Paul W. van der Veur's introduction in Agpalo 1969, p. vii. Agpalo later expanded his essay into a book Agpalo 1972.

<sup>16</sup> Machado 1971; Machado 1972.

<sup>17</sup> Nowak and Snyder 1970. In Schmidt, et al. 1977, p. 493, Scott revising his earlier position, acknowledged that machine politics “represent a particular form of electoral clientelism” which engaged in “the political coordination of favors, patronage, and public contracts.”

<sup>18</sup> *Pakisama* roughly translates into “camaraderie” (but with strict reciprocity).

upon the electoral role of congressional machines were changing to more complex and autonomous amalgamations of interests forming at the municipal level. He noted that election excesses had risen, and he attributed this to increased individuals' demands relative to the normative capacity of the political system to fulfill them. In his study, Shantz appended a long list of cases of violence, coercion and other irregularities committed during the 1969 elections.<sup>19</sup>

The cogency of the patron-client model continued to decline. Even its principal author could no longer deny its inadequacies. In a 1973 study of networks and groups in Southeast Asia, Landé drew up a number of consequences resulting from heavy reliance on patron-client and other dyadic methods of goal attainment. Some of these chipped away at the benign and integrative picture of the patron-client model he had earlier drawn. He acknowledged, for instance, that reliance on dyadic methods produced dissatisfaction among those not receiving rewards; that by permitting favoritism, it contributed to near anarchy in many areas and eroded public confidence in the system of government; and that it made the mobilization of political support immensely costly in money and effort. In his conclusion, he virtually conceded the demise of the patron-client model, while maintaining that personal bonds remained important in Philippine politics: "While traditional patron-client relationships appear to be breaking down in many peasant societies, other types of dyadic structures and techniques will continue to play a part in politics as long as political actors seek and are able to advance their interests particularistically."<sup>20</sup>

Landé's attempt at expanding the patron-client, factional model to encompass other personal ties and dyadic structures did not seem to help much. In a study of politics, patronage and class conflict in Central Luzon, Willem Wolters found that by the late 1960s and early 1970s, patron-client relations, brokerage and other forms of personal intermediation did not have a stable and permanent character and did not provide structural linkages between the local community and the central state. Landownership had become less important as a basis for power and prestige. Moreover, landlord-tenant relations were no longer on a patron-client basis – they "had become much less persistent, the scope of the exchange had narrowed, the tie binding the parties had become weaker and less comprehensive, and was more instrumental in character." Meanwhile, the state apparatus had become increasingly important as a provider of capital,

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<sup>19</sup> Shantz 1972.

<sup>20</sup> Landé 1973.

either directly through government credit programmes and pork barrel funds; or indirectly by giving political direction for the allocation of commercial loans. Huge amounts of government money were being distributed along particularistic lines, e.g., pork barrel funds during elections, but such patronage could be dispensed without recourse to patron-client ties.<sup>21</sup>

The political machine model came under heavy criticism too. Louis Benson argued that descriptively, the model was helpful but as an analytic basis for predicting change, the model was lacking. Conditions in the U.S. and England that allowed their politics to move from particularistic rewards to issue orientation, noted Benson, did not exist in the Philippines. When the American and English social systems grew increasingly complex, the resource base and the existence of colonies or a frontier enabled their economies to develop and expand. Moreover, the governments of both had financially sound governments when they took over the social welfare roles previously handled by political machines. Lastly, the U.S. and England had strong party systems capable of reinforcing political alliances.<sup>22</sup>

In 1974, in contrast to their 1970 findings, Nowak and Snyder saw a decline in the integrative capacity of clientelist machines. According to them, such factors as greater social mobilization, ethnic diversity and urbanization had made patronage resources scarcer, thus heightening intra-elite competition, and eventually rendering clientelist machines less effective in mobilizing broad groups of people. The reduced strength of these machines intensified the potential for more violent forms of mass activity, which in turn provoked such responses from the elite as the declaration of martial law. Thus, Nowak and Snyder linked the declaration of martial law with a decline in the integrative capacity of clientelist structures.<sup>23</sup>

As pointed out by Scott, the political machine form can occur only in a setting where, among others, the selection of political leaders is through elections.<sup>24</sup> Under martial law, Marcos put an end to elections, at least for a time. Ditto for the political machines. Two years after the imposition of martial law, Machado revised his erstwhile optimistic view of the “new men” of the now virtually defunct political machines. He predicted that the new professionals,

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<sup>21</sup> Wolters 1983. Wolters' book was based on his Ph.D. dissertation, “Class Relationships and Political Processes in Central Luzon, Philippines,” University of Amsterdam, 1975.

<sup>22</sup> Benson 1973.

<sup>23</sup> Nowak and Snyder 1974a; Nowak and Snyder 1974b; Nowak 1974.

<sup>24</sup> Scott 1969, p. 1143.

lacking independent resources, would likely be absorbed by Marcos' authoritarian system.<sup>25</sup>

By the mid-1970s, the patron-client model, even with its "clientelist machine" variant, had outlived its usefulness as an interpretative framework of Philippine politics. While patron-client bonds could still account for a great deal of the political behavior in both rural and urban areas, they could not explain, in Kerkvliet's words, "the role of violence, coercion, intimidation, monetary inducements, and the considerable autonomy elites have to manipulate formal democratic procedures to their liking" and "the influence, even control of foreign interests over Philippine politics."<sup>26</sup> The exchange of favors in a patron-client relationship was apt to lead to a bit of corruption, but the large-scale corruption and, most especially, the violence and coercion, went way beyond the placid clientelist order originally painted. In the decade prior to martial law, elections had become so marred by corruption, fraud, and the threat or use of force that "guns, goons, gold" had become a byword in Philippine politics. After the 1969 elections, the losing presidential candidate candidly protested that Marcos had "out-gunned, out-goosed and out-gold" him.<sup>27</sup> The 1971 elections were marked by a record 534 violent incidents and 905 deaths.<sup>28</sup> Neither could the patron-client model convincingly explain martial law. To state that the breakdown of clientelist machines brought about martial law was to admit that there were factors well outside of patron-client bonds that had to be considered.

### ***The Neocolonial or Dependency Framework***

The neocolonial or dependency interpretation of Philippine politics has long been articulated and espoused by Philippine leftwing nationalists. According to Renato Constantino, the country's foremost nationalist scholar, the United States actually retained control over the Philippines even after "granting" it independence in 1946. The US exercised "neocolonial" or "indirect colonial rule" by continuing to dominate the Philippine economy, retaining it as a market for American goods, a source of raw materials and an open field for American investments. To guarantee such economic control, the US maintained military bases on Philippine soil that were outside Philippine sovereignty and tied the country to various military pacts. Constantino considered the Filipino economic

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<sup>25</sup> Machado 1974a; Machado 1974b.

<sup>26</sup> Kerkvliet 1995, p. 405.

<sup>27</sup> Abueva 1970 p. 62.

<sup>28</sup> Linantud 1998, p. 301.

and political elite as identifying and working closely with foreign interests, and as merely being “a sub-elite within an essentially colonial framework.”<sup>29</sup> Alejandro Lichauco described neocolonialism or “imperialism” as a “total problem,” affecting all vital aspects of the national life. He traced the country’s ills – massive and deepening poverty, rising unemployment, runaway inflation, the remorseless exploitation of the economy, the infantile state of military and productive capacities, the disoriented educational system and social anarchy – directly or indirectly to the country’s neocolonial status.<sup>30</sup> Philippine communists, who had been propagating the neocolonial interpretation of Philippine politics even as early as the late 1940s, were much more strident in their critiques of neocolonialism.<sup>31</sup> The CPP, for instance, labeled all the country’s administrations as “puppets of US imperialism,” e.g., the “US-Marcos regime” (which later became the “US-Marcos dictatorship”). Although it sometimes used the term “neocolonial,” the CPP preferred the Maoist term “semicolonial” (often with “semifeudal” attached to it) to characterize the Philippines.

During the period of the stormy protest rallies of 1970-72, the writings of nationalist authors gained wide readership. The resurgence of the nationalist movement was no doubt influenced by the worldwide “rediscovery of imperialism”<sup>32</sup> and the rise of dependency school in Latin America, both occurring in the late 1960s and early 70s. With the advent of martial law, the neocolonial or dependency interpretation gradually replaced the patron-client model as the predominant interpretation of Philippine politics. The increased dependence of the Marcos regime on economic and military assistance from the U.S. and multilateral aid agencies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) was an added factor for its rise. Some scholars of elite politics, an early version of the elite-democracy framework, moved over to the neocolonial framework.<sup>33</sup>

Under martial law, Marcos clamped down on all dissent and threw thousands of dissenters, including many nationalist writers, into detention. For a while, there was a lull in nationalist and anti-imperialist literature in Philippine

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<sup>29</sup> Constantino 1970; Constantino 1978.

<sup>30</sup> Lichauco 1973.

<sup>31</sup> The Philippines’ “old” communist party was founded in November 1930; the “new” communist party, in December 1968. Both parties use the names *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) and Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). However, PKP has been more commonly used to refer to the old party, and CPP, to the new party. See Pomeroy 1970 for an analysis of neocolonialism from the perspective of the Soviet Union-aligned PKP and Guerrero 1979a for that of the Maoist CPP.

<sup>32</sup> See Magdoff 1969.

<sup>33</sup> One of these was Dante Simbulan, an early writer on elite politics. See Simbulan 1970, p. 4.



academia. In the vacuum, political scientists supportive of martial law echoed Marcos' pitch that martial law was an effort to "reform society" – or a "democratic revolution" against communists on the one hand and "oligarchs" on the other – that would ultimately build a "New Society" in which class and interest conflicts would be replaced by an organic harmony of interests and social discipline.<sup>34</sup>

Non-Filipino academics and foreign-based Filipino scholars critical of martial law, however, could not be covered by Marcos' clampdown. Characterizing Marcos' imposition of martial law as a coup, Robert Stauffer asserted that foreign control over the Philippine economy had held back economic development to such an extent that conditions had made a resort to authoritarian rule extremely likely.<sup>35</sup> According to Jonathan Fast, the Philippines had long served as a politically tranquil base for U.S. imperialism, but martial law – an attack by Marcos on his bourgeois rivals – and the establishment of a "bourgeois dictatorship" plunged the Philippines into a political crisis of a type it had never before experienced.<sup>36</sup> Walden Bello and Severina Rivera argued that the Marcos dictatorship remained in power primarily because of the vast quantities of military and economic assistance – the "logistics of repression" – it received from the U.S.<sup>37</sup>

In a later article, Stauffer described the martial law regime as having "decidedly corporatist characteristics" – competing groups being forced to merge under state sponsorship, labor being coerced to "cooperate with management and the government, etc. He contended, however, that Marcos' "state corporatism," like its authoritarian counterparts in Latin America, was still very much within the context of peripheral, delayed-dependent capitalism.<sup>38</sup> In a third article, Stauffer showed how "authoritarian supports – ideological and material – from a metropolitan nation (in this instance the United States) into a Third World country (the Philippines)" had been used by anti-nationalist groups in the Philippines to overthrow the existing political system and to institute a "dependent-authoritarian regime."<sup>39</sup>

By the late 1970s, the nationalist movement surged anew in the Philippines. Old and new writings of nationalist scholars were again in wide circulation. In the thick of the nationalist resurgence came a lively, multi-sided

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<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, Agpalo 1973, Dubsky 1974 and Muego 1975.

<sup>35</sup> Stauffer 1973.

<sup>36</sup> Fast 1973.

<sup>37</sup> Bello and S. Rivera 1977.

<sup>38</sup> Stauffer 1977a.

<sup>39</sup> Stauffer 1979.

“mode of production” debate that had much bearing on the neocolonial framework itself. The debate was conducted through various forums and through publications of the University of the Philippines’ Third World Studies Center, as well as the *Diliman Review*, *New Philippine Review* and some books. Leftists aligned with the CPP defended the thesis that the Philippines was a “semicolonial and semifeudal” country in which emerging bourgeois leaders had been coopted by imperialism and turned into “big comprador-bourgeois.”<sup>40</sup> Those identified with the pro-Moscow Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), argued that it was a backward neocolony being groomed under the “new international division of labor” to become an industrial one albeit only engaged in the production of labor-intensive commodities for export.<sup>41</sup> The dependency perspective, wrote Randolph David, essentially “stresses the importance of examining the relationship of domination and dependency between the advanced capitalist countries (metropolitan countries) and the underdeveloped countries (also known as satellites or peripheral economies) as a way of accounting for the poor countries’ continuing underdevelopment.”<sup>42</sup> A good number of the dependency or world-systems scholars used the historical approach in explaining how the Philippines became a dependent-capitalist state or was integrated into the capitalist world-system.<sup>43</sup> The “articulation” school claimed that capitalism in the neocolonies “articulated” or intermeshed with pre-capitalist modes and that the transition to capitalism thus remained incomplete.<sup>44</sup>

Due to continuing restrictions to free expression, the “mode of production” debate tended to avoid going into deep open discussion of Philippine politics. But a number of scholars did venture. Rigoberto Tiglao, for instance, argued that the Philippines’ “backward capitalism” had generated an unstable state machinery and prevented the smooth operation of elections. Moreover, limited capital sources and the existence of large power groupings arising from landownership and the bureaucracy resulted in “explosive intra-elite struggles to capture a prime source of capital accumulation – the state.” Complete centralization of political authority was needed to manage these contradictions.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ferrer 1984.

<sup>41</sup> Magallona 1982.

<sup>42</sup> David 1980, p. 83.

<sup>43</sup> For a more detailed account of the “mode of production” debate, see Rojas 1992. Rojas identified Fast, Jim Richardson, Brian Fegan, Peter Limqueco, Alfred McCoy and Marshall McLennan with the historical approach of dependency theory, Tiglao, the political economy approach, and Magno, the “relative autonomy of the state” approach.

<sup>44</sup> Rivera 1982a; Rivera 1982b; Banzon-Bautista 1984.

<sup>45</sup> Tiglao 1979.

Going over the “mode of production” debate in the Philippines in retrospect in 2001, Kathleen Weekley concludes that the debate, as in other countries, did not really get anywhere. In her assessment, it was highly theoretical and empirically weak. Moreover, it was based on questionable assumptions, restricted by narrow terms of reference, and “dogged by a tendency to pit detailed textual exegeses of Marx against each other.”<sup>46</sup>

While the “mode of production” controversy kept on in the Philippines, foreign-based scholars further expounded on the neo-colonial/dependency theme. Presenting a conventional neocolonial picture, Stephen Shalom traced how the U.S. restored the Philippines’ prewar elite to power; defined the terms of Philippine independence to preserve U.S. economic and strategic interests; intervened in the political crisis of the early 1950s; maintained military and economic aid to further its own interests and those of local allies; and backed the imposition of martial law.<sup>47</sup> Bello, David Kinley and Elaine Elinson also hammered on the neocolonial theme in their study exposing the “development debacle” of the World Bank’s policies in the Philippines. In the analysis of Bello, et al., Marcos’ authoritarian rule reflected the shift in U.S. policy in the Third World from the traditional line of promoting elite-dominated democracies (or “elite democracies”) as the means of U.S. control to supporting repressive allied regimes. They contended that in its “colonization [of the Philippines] without an occupation force,” the U.S. used the world’s largest development aid institution, the WB, in which they claimed the U.S. had the dominant influence. In extending massive aid to the Philippines, the Bank had two fundamental objectives: “to stabilize the deteriorating political situation and to more thoroughly integrate the Philippine economy into the international capitalist order dominated by the United States.” The WB’s failed development effort in the Philippines was particularly significant in that it “was the first coordinated, broad front experiment in technocratic, authoritarian modernization” and “was not just a country program but a larger model for Third World development.”<sup>48</sup>

In a study of the political economy of transnational corporate investment in Philippine agriculture, Gary Hawes drew up a model of the Philippine state conceptualized “not as a sovereign actor representing in a democratic manner the interest of pluralist groups, but rather as a penetrated and class-dominated state.” Like other Third World countries, the Philippines had been integrated into the world economy in a dependent role. Hawes depicted the Philippine state as

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<sup>46</sup> Weekley 2001, p. 51.

<sup>47</sup> Shalom 1981.

an instrument for class domination, the defender of the general interests of capital. Institutions and practices such as patron-client ties, building political organizations and government subsidization of food prices were merely attempts to mask the state's partiality.<sup>49</sup>

Towards the end of the Marcos era, Amando Doronila, whose position appears to be aligned more with the elite democracy framework, came up with a more nuanced interpretation of the intra-elite conflict leading up to the imposition of martial law. According to him, the rise of wealth enclaves in the country's industrial growth centers in the postcolonial years provided political parties with capitalistic financing for electoral campaigns. The availability of these private financial resources allowed postcolonial Presidents with strong centralist tendencies to bypass the traditional clientelist pyramid in mobilizing rural support by rerouting patronage flow through such channels as the bureaucracy and alternative local leaders. This weakened the traditional clientelist alliance structures dominated by provincial political families. Through the 1950s and the early 60s, Congress, a bastion of the oligarchic families, managed to check the executive branch. The first Marcos administration (1966-69), however, decisively shifted the center of gravity towards the presidency. Resorting to extensive internal and external borrowing, Marcos greatly expanded the direct role of the government in the economy, particularly through his infrastructure development program. The power of the legislature ebbed away as a result of "the disintegration of the clientelist base of its members and the transfer of the linkages of the lower classes to the paternalistic State leadership." The imposition of authoritarian rule was but the culmination of a process in which the traditional patron-client relationship was superseded by state paternalism.<sup>50</sup>

Unlike the patron-client model, which could not account for the change from a democratic to an authoritarian regime, the neocolonial model did come up with plausible explanations for regime change from authoritarianism back to democracy. Bello and John Gershman, for instance, linked the return of elite democracy in the Philippines and a few other Third World allies of the U.S. to a growing recognition among U.S. policymakers that maintaining authoritarian rule as a form of domination was becoming more and more untenable. "The [U.S.] foreign policy establishment," they wrote, "is relearning the lesson that the

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<sup>48</sup> Bello, Kinley and Elinson 1982.

<sup>49</sup> Hawes 1984.

<sup>50</sup> Doronila 1985.

contradictory union of expansionism and missionary democracy is the engine that drives U.S. imperialism.”<sup>51</sup>

Not long after the fall of Marcos, the influence of the neocolonial/dependency view of Philippine politics nonetheless waned. Many scholars could not accept the idea that Marcos had merely been a U.S. puppet or that it had mainly been the U.S. that had propped up his authoritarian regime. “[I]t is perhaps part of the colonial legacy,” commented Landé, “that there remains an exaggerated view of what the American government can accomplish in the Philippines.”<sup>52</sup> Perhaps a more telling factor for the decline of the neocolonial perspective and the rise of the elite democracy perspective is the shift, often gradual, of a number of advocates of the former perspective (e.g., Hawes, Bello and Gershman) to the latter.<sup>53</sup>

### ***The Elite-Democracy or Patrimonial Framework***

Dante Simbulan’s “A Study of the Socio-economic Elite in Philippine Politics and Government, 1946-1963,” which came out at about the same time as *Leaders, Factions, and Parties*, appears to be the pioneering study on the patrimonial/elite-democracy framework – or what was then referred to simply as “elite politics.” Simbulan had the same observations as Landé on the indistinguishability of the country’s two main parties, loose party identification and frequent defections, but, utilizing Laswell’s theory on the elite, he came up with a different explanation. The parties were similar because they were essentially alliances of leaders coming from the same socio-economic stratum – the elite. Simbulan showed that the Philippine elite had a long history marked by a remarkable continuity. He traced how Spanish colonizers turned the pre-colonial *datus* (chiefs) and *maharlikas* (nobles), together with mestizos, into the privileged local class, the *principalia* (later, also known as the *caciques*); how this privileged class accumulated land, wealth and power under Spanish and American colonial rule; and how the *principalia* evolved into the modern-day

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<sup>51</sup> Bello and Gershman 1990, p. 54.

<sup>52</sup> Landé 1981, p. 1164.

<sup>53</sup> As late as 1990, Bello and Gershman still contended that authoritarianism and “elite democracy” were but two forms of political domination by U.S. neocolonialism or imperialism in Third World countries (Bello and Gershman 1990). In 1992, Bello and Gershman de-linked their concept of elite democracy from the neocolonial perspective. They contended that the issue of the Philippines’ national sovereignty had to be “re-visioned” in the light of sea changes in the world scene like the end of the Cold War and the decline of U.S. imperialism in Asia (Gershman and Bello 1993, pp. 38, 166). In more recent years, they have been strong critics of neoliberal globalization, as well as of the presence of U.S. military troops in the Philippines.

elite. The Philippines' two major parties had formal rules on party organization patterned after the American model, but the power relations in the social structure impinged on the formal organization. In the provinces, factions composed of elite families, especially "political dynasties," served as the nuclei of party organization, and provincial politics revolved around the interests of these elite family groupings. To win an election, elite politicians made effective use of money (including public funds), "gifts," even violence and fraud, as well as of the cultural norms. While in office, they utilized political power to enrich themselves and their backers. Philippine political parties were elite, not multi-class, parties. Far from satisfying the needs of various social strata, they served only the interests of the modern *principalia*.<sup>54</sup>

Early on in the post-dictatorship period, the possible return to predominance of the patron-client model was precluded. In a study of "Philippine colonial democracy," Ruby Paredes, Michael Cullinane, Glenn May and Alfred McCoy essentially confirmed Simbulan's thesis on the remarkable continuity of the Philippine elite and the practice of elite politics, at least as far back as the waning years of Spanish colonialism. When formal elections were first introduced in the Philippines in the 1880s, the Spanish colonial authorities allowed municipal elites to contend for local dominance. Fierce factional rivalries for local power and its perks ensued. An "electoral style of dexterous manipulation" emerged, and "leaders were schooled in the art of using government, not in the ethos of public service." Under American colonial rule, electoral politics started out as a contest of the elite and it remained such all throughout. The American authorities disparaged the municipal politicians as "*caciques*, or corrupt local autocrats" yet they relied on them in moving up elections from the municipal to the provincial and finally to the national level. Filipino leaders saw themselves as the "directing class," "an entity that knows how to govern," as distinguished from the popular masses, "an entity that knows how to obey." Filipino politicians entered into a complex web of clientelist relations involving their local supporters, as well as American officials. The dyads stretched from the villages, towns and provinces not just to the national capital, as Landé had put it, but all the way to Washington. "Denied equality with Americans under law," wrote Paredes, "Filipino leaders adopted tactics of guile and manipulation to win from American patrons political concessions they needed to maintain the loyalty of their Filipino clients." In time, guile and manipulation graduated to coercion and force. By the 1930s, provincial politics

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<sup>54</sup> Simbulan 1965.

already displayed “a marked predilection for institutionalized violence.”<sup>55</sup> Apart from deforming Landé’s patron-client pyramid, the account of Paredes, et al., of Philippine colonial politics belied his assertion that “Filipinos have under American tutelage been imbued with the belief that nepotism and corruption are bad for the country and not to be tolerated.”<sup>56</sup>

The term *elite democracy* appears to have caught on fast in the scholarly literature of the post-Marcos era. Hawes, Francisco Nemenzo Jr., Bello and Gershman, Stauffer, Timberman and Caoili all used the term, characterizing the coming to power of Corazon Aquino as the restoration of elite democracy in the Philippines. Hawes, Nemenzo and Stauffer likened elite democracy under Aquino to the system that Marcos demolished with martial law, but Bello and Gershman emphasized one vital difference: elected members had to share political power with the military. Hawes, Bello and Gershman (1990), and Stauffer drew an image of Philippine politics similar to Simbulan’s “elite politics,” except that Hawes, Bello and Gershman portrayed the local ruling classes as being allied to foreign capital or imperialism and Stauffer painted elite democracy as the continuation of “colonial democracy.”<sup>57</sup> Bello and Gershman pointed out that elite politicians won the vast majority of the posts in the 1987 and 1988 polls, thanks to “the combination of money, high media visibility, leftist ambivalence, and the continuing strong influence of patron-client relationships.” Elite democracy, they explained, is more complicated than authoritarian rule. Borrowing from Gramsci, they characterized elite democracy as being “based on the creation of cultural or ideological hegemony, obtaining the consent of the ruled through the use of institutions, symbols, and processes that enjoy a strong degree of legitimacy among the ruled.” Elections serves as the means for the relatively peaceful alternation in power among rival elite factions. Through mass socialization and the enormous advantage conferred by wealth and resources to elite politicians, elite democracy screens out fundamental challenges to the social status quo.<sup>58</sup>

Most of the other post-authoritarian interpretations of Philippine politics – cacique democracy, domination by political families or clans, oligarchic

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<sup>55</sup> Paredes 1988.

<sup>56</sup> Landé 1965, p. 54.

<sup>57</sup> Hawes 1987; Nemenzo 1988; Bello 1988; Stauffer 1990; Bello and Gershman 1990; Timberman 1991; Caoili 1991. Bello also denoted the Philippines’ pre-martial law political system as *patronage democracy*, which he defined as a formal electoral system superimposed on the competition for power among land-based and mercantile elites, who mobilized the lower classes in their electoral contests through kinship and patronage (Bello 1988, p. 215).

<sup>58</sup> Bello and Gershman 1990.

democracy, low-intensity democracy, oligarchic patrimonialism, bossism and clientelist electoralism – are variations on the theme of elite rule. Like Simbulan, Benedict Anderson sought to underscore the continuity of the lineage of the Philippines' present-day elite from the caciques of the Spanish colonial era. Thus, Anderson coined *cacique democracy* – the marriage of American electoralism with Spanish caciquism. He saw the beginnings of Philippine political dynasties in the “palmy days” of the American colonial period when provincial and local elective offices proliferated and caciques stacked these offices with their relatives and friends. Private armies and warlords emerged in the early postcolonial years when the landed elite sought to subdue restive peasants and restore uncontested cacique rule. The oligarchy faced no serious domestic challenges in 1954-72 – “the full heyday of cacique democracy in the Philippines.” In resorting to authoritarian rule, Marcos was either the “Master Cacique” who pushed the destructive logic of the old order to its natural conclusion, or “Manila’s Louis Napoleon,” who understood that “wealth serves power” and that “the key card is the state.” Post-Marcos politics saw the return to cacique democracy, with members of the traditional political families again dominating electoral politics.<sup>59</sup>

A small debate ensued between those who viewed Philippine politics as still largely clan politics at work and those who saw it mainly as machine politics. Edicio de la Torre identified the continuing domination of political clans as a formidable obstacle to democratization, and considered the political machine as just another variation of clan dominance. On the other hand, Francisco Magno contended that the political machine had replaced the system of political clans as the main expression of patronage ties in local politics. He basically echoed what Scott and Machado had already written about machine politics in the late 1960s and early 70s, but he failed to elaborate on how machine politics had functioned since the declaration of martial law and since the toppling of Marcos. In reply, Eric Gutierrez, Ildefonso Torrente and Noli Narca showed through their study of clan affiliations of top contenders in the 1987 congressional and 1988 local elections that “old horses” crowded the political battlefield and that the elections had paved the way for the “return of the oligarchs.” They asserted that political clans and dynasties still formed the backbone of the political machines, that

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<sup>59</sup> Anderson 1988. Maria Gloria Cano Garcia argues that the term *cacique*, as used in the Philippines, is an American construction. According to her, *cazique* (old Spanish spelling) denoted a chieftain or local magnate in Latin America. In applying the term to the Philippines, American officials and scholars “de-contextualized” it and gave it a new meaning: “a corrupt system of local government – a cancer – implemented or fostered by the Spaniards in the Philippines.” Cano Garcia contends that American officials used



these clans, rather than parties, served as the main vehicles for political mobilization and access to political office, and that clan dominance remained the most decisive influence in shaping the nature and character of Philippine politics.<sup>60</sup> Analyzing the 1992 elections, James Putzel concurred that the essential character of machine politics continued to be determined by clan identities.<sup>61</sup>

Felipe Miranda and Rivera, paraphrasing Migdal, characterized the Philippines as having a weak state and strong, well-organized social forces taking advantage of state resources for vested-interest use. Miranda drew particular attention to the aggressiveness of oligarchic interests (political-economic clans). Religious groups, business groups, NGOs and armed challengers also competed with the state for pre-eminence, and transnational influences – the U.S. and multilateral lending institutions – remained strong. Rivera argued that the Philippine state was dominated by an entrenched elite based on land and merchant capital, and foreign capitalists. Lacking the “embedded autonomy” found in other “developmental states” in Asia, the Philippine state had been captured by competing social interests and had not been able to build an effective social coalition necessary for sustainable industrial development.<sup>62</sup>

To find an explanation for the Philippines’ laggard economic growth, Paul Hutchcroft examined the relationship between the state and dominant economic interests, focusing on the banking sector, and found that the obstacles to the country’s sustained development lay in the very nature of the political system. Commenting on David Wurfel’s and Belinda Aquino’s characterizations of the Marcos dictatorship as “patrimonial” or “neopatrimonial authoritarianism” and as “the politics of plunder,” respectively,<sup>63</sup> Hutchcroft argued that patrimonialism ran much deeper and was not limited to the Marcos regime. The Philippine state was itself a *patrimonial oligarchic state*, a weak state preyed upon by “a powerful oligarchic class that enjoys an independent economic base outside the state, yet depends upon particularistic access to the political machinery as the major avenue to private accumulation.” Hutchcroft characterized the capitalist system prevailing in the Philippines as *rent capitalism*<sup>64</sup> (as opposed to production-oriented capitalism), in particular, *booty*

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*cacique* and *caciquismo* to characterize a dysfunctional system that they themselves had established. See Cano Garcia 2004.

<sup>60</sup> Gutierrez et al. 1992.

<sup>61</sup> Putzel 1995a.

<sup>62</sup> Miranda 1991; Rivera 1994.

<sup>63</sup> Wurfel 1988; Aquino 1987.

<sup>64</sup> Hutchcroft 1993, p. 560 used Stanislaw Andreski’s definition of rent capitalism as a system in which “money is invested in arrangements for appropriating wealth which has already been produced rather than in [arrangements for actually] producing it.”

*capitalism*, where “a powerful oligarchic business class extracts privilege from a largely incoherent bureaucracy.” Unlike other scholars who have tended to equate the oligarchy with the established landed elite, Hutchcroft made a more accurate characterization of the Philippine oligarchy as being “not a fixed aristocracy, but rather a social group that is based on wealth and that changes over time.” He asserted that the Philippines’ patrimonial oligarchic state and booty capitalism constituted a “development bog” in which the postwar Philippine economy had repeatedly become mired. He argued that unless there would be greater development of the state apparatus, the Philippines would be unable to achieve sustained economic success.<sup>65</sup>

There were still other references to “oligarchy” and “oligarchic” rule. Richard Robison, Kevin Hewison, Garry Rodan and Damien Kingsbury referred to the Philippines as an “oligarchic democracy” – basically the same as “elite democracy” and “cacique democracy.”<sup>66</sup> In several case studies of Philippine “political families,” a group of social scientists headed by McCoy further explored the relationship between a “weak state” and “powerful political oligarchies.” According to McCoy, two key elements appear to have contributed to the emergence of these powerful elite families: “the rise of ‘rents’<sup>67</sup> as a significant share of the nation’s economy and a simultaneous attenuation of central government control over the provinces.” Elite families were organized on the basis of *kinship network* – a working coalition consisting of people related by blood, marriage, and ritual kinship. A “fissiparous, even volatile factionalism” resulted from such flexible kinship ties being brought into the political arena. To maintain themselves in power, the political families resorted to various tactics and methods, but most especially to political violence and “rent-seeking,” with the former being prevalent in the provinces, and the latter concentrated in the capital. The interaction between the state and the rent-seeking political families has been synergistic. “Simply put,” wrote McCoy, “the privatization of public resources strengthens a few fortunate families while weakening the state’s resources and its bureaucratic apparatus.”<sup>68</sup>

The Philippines was one of four case studies of “low intensity democracies” conducted by a group headed by Barry Gills, Joel Rocamora and Richard Wilson. Gills, et al., evoked the American counter-insurgency catch-

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<sup>65</sup> Hutchcroft 1991; Hutchcroft 1993; Hutchcroft 1998a.

<sup>66</sup> Robison et al. 1993; Kingsbury 2001, chap. 12.

<sup>67</sup> Borrowing from James Buchanan, McCoy 1993, p. 11, explained that “rents are created when a state gives an entrepreneur an artificial advantage by restricting ‘freedom of entry’ into the market.”

<sup>68</sup> McCoy 1993a.

phrase “low intensity conflict” to show that the struggle to define “democracy” had become a major ideological battle. “Low intensity democracies” were newly-restored Third World democracies which had formally instituted some of the features of Western liberal democracies like periodic elections but had preserved ossified political and economic structures from an authoritarian past and had failed to broaden popular political participation in a meaningful way. In the four countries studied, the society was characterized by a big gap between the rich and the poor, and the new democracy was “compromised by, if not subservient to, the established power structure,” with the civilian conservative government, the military and business elite forming a “hegemonic bloc.” A “dictatorship” over the working class and other popular sectors persisted, usually in the form of a strengthened presidential office.<sup>69</sup>

John Sidel drew attention to the phenomenon of *bossism* in the Philippines. He used the term bossism, instead of caciquism and clientelism, to underscore the institutional structures inherited by the Philippine state from the American colonial era and the role of violence and coercion in shaping the country’s economic accumulation, political competition and social relations. He defined *bosses* as “predatory power brokers who achieve monopolistic control over both coercive and economic resources within given territorial jurisdictions or bailiwicks,” and bossism as “the interlocking, multitiered directorate of bosses who use their control over the state apparatus to exploit the archipelago’s human and natural resources.” Sidel examined patterns of bossism at the municipal, district, provincial and national levels, ending up with a brief account of the Marcos martial law era – “a protracted period of national-level boss rule.” While concurring with Hutchcroft’s thesis on the Philippine state’s being an object of oligarchical plunder, he also portrayed the Philippine state as itself being predatory – “a complex set of predatory mechanisms for the private exploitation and accumulation of the archipelago’s human, natural, and monetary resources.” Comparing the Philippine experience with those of other countries in Southeast Asia and Latin America, Sidel averred that bossism is common in democracies that have underdeveloped and weakly insulated state apparatuses and that are in an early stage of capital accumulation.<sup>70</sup> Following Sidel, Olle Törnquist propounded that “populist bossism” has prevailed in the Philippines since the fall of Marcos. While the social basis of the old system – political clans and

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<sup>69</sup> Gills, Rocamora and Wilson 1993. The three other case studies were Argentina, Guatemala and South Korea.

<sup>70</sup> Sidel 1999.

clientelism – was slowly being undermined, the country was stamped by “the elitist boss-democracy of former times.”<sup>71</sup>

To come up with a finer categorization of political systems that are neither fully authoritarian nor fully democratic, Franco presented four possible types of regimes: electoral authoritarian, clientelist electoral, militarized electoral and demilitarizing electoral. She classified the Marcos dictatorship as electoral authoritarian, and the pre- and post-dictatorship regimes as clientelist electoral. She described a *clientelist electoral regime* as “an electorally competitive national regime which falls short of the minimum democratic threshold because of the persistence of local authoritarian enclaves.” Like Sidel, Franco paid particular attention to the role of coercion at the local level of the political system. Instead of “bossism,” however, Franco opted to use *authoritarian clientelism*, described by Jonathan Fox as a situation in which “imbalanced bargaining relations require the enduring political subordination of clients and are reinforced by the threat of coercion.”<sup>72</sup> Franco’s concept of electoral clientelism clearly departs from Landé’s concept of benign patron-client relationships.

### ***A Critique of the Prominent Interpretations of Philippine Politics***

Historian Reynaldo Ileto has launched a stinging broadside against a number of American scholars for their “colonial” and “orientalist” construction of Philippine politics. Among them are some scholars identified with the patron-client and patrimonial/elite-democracy frameworks. Ileto inveighs against Landé for portraying the Philippine political system as consisting of “pale imitations, distortions, or outright contradictions of the ideal [i.e., the Western liberal model].” While I certainly agree with Ileto that Landé’s postulation on “American tutelage” does belong to colonial discourse, I do not think that the same can be said of Landé’s patron-client paradigm. As Ileto himself admits, the paradigm is an old one that had a “rebirth” in the 1960s. Clientelist politics actually dates back to the Spanish colonial period, with no less than Philippine national hero, Jose Rizal, somewhat describing it in his second novel, *El Filibusterismo* (1889).<sup>73</sup> Landé’s role in the “rebirth” of the patron-client model is a great contribution to Philippine political science. Patron-client ties, while overdrawn in

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<sup>71</sup> Törnquist 1999, pp. 128, 165.

<sup>72</sup> Franco 2001.

Landé's model, remain an important feature of Philippine political dynamics. Iletto criticizes Landé for noting such "peculiarities" of Philippine political parties as indistinguishability, constant affiliation-switching and fluidity. However, other political and social scientists – Filipino and non-Filipino – have observed the same features and have rightly referred to them not just as peculiarities, but as the faults of a weak party system.

Instead of castigating the likes of Cullinane, May, McCoy, Anderson and Sidel for colonial or orientalist discourse, as Iletto does, I applaud their efforts in trying to reverse colonial historiography. In the main, they dispel the myth of the U.S. colonial period being a golden age, and they show how the institutional legacies of U.S.-imposed "colonial democracy" facilitated the emergence and entrenchment of oligarchs and warlords. Most creditable is *Philippine Colonial Democracy*, which Cullinane, May, McCoy co-wrote with Paredes,<sup>74</sup> and which Iletto unfortunately did not include in the works reviewed. Iletto rightly chastises some of the American scholars for depicting Filipino elite leaders only as self-serving "big men," practically devoid of patriotic or civic ethos. Nonetheless, I tend to agree with patrimonial/elite-democracy model adherents that for the contemporary oligarchic elite, private gain far outweighs public benefit. Iletto further excoriates McCoy, Cullinane and Sidel for depicting the reality of Philippine politics as consisting of "the familism, localism, corruption, and violence that essentially underlie Filipino political behavior." On this charge, I could in large part concur with Iletto. Such a charge, however, can also be leveled against most of the other adherents of the patrimonial/elite-democracy model, Filipino and non-Filipino. Patronage and "guns, goons and gold" may well be reflective of Filipino *elite* political behavior but not the entirety of Filipino political behavior.

This brings me now to my main criticism of the main paradigms of politics in the Philippines. I contend that the three prominent frameworks or interpretations of Philippine politics – the patron-client, neo-colonial/dependency and patrimonial/elite-democracy models (including such variants of the last model as the patrimonial oligarchic state and bossism) – suffer from a major weakness: their incomplete, top-down view of Philippine politics.

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<sup>73</sup> Rizal wrote: "In the Philippines it is a well-known fact that patrons are needed for everything, from the time one is christened until one dies, in order to get justice, to secure a passport, or to develop an industry." (Derbyshire 1963, p. 290.)

<sup>74</sup> See pp. 36-7.

For the patron-client framework, being unable to account for intra-elite violence was bad enough. Perhaps the most egregious failing of the model, however, was that it was blind to the serious class and ethnic tensions that threatened to tear Philippine society apart. Once before, in the early 1950s, landlord-peasant tensions had already resulted in a mighty explosion – the Huk rebellion, in which the PKP figured prominently. The rebellion was crushed by the mid-1950s, and this perhaps explains why the patron-client model saw only tranquil patron-client relationships.<sup>75</sup> As high levels of landlessness and social inequality persisted, however, the class tensions built up again. The late 1960s saw the birth of a new communist insurgency, the CPP. In 1970-72, tens of thousands of students, workers, urban poor and peasants marched out into the streets of Manila and other urban centers. Strongly influenced by the revolutionary left, they railed against “imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism.” A number of rallies turned into pitched battles between policemen using truncheons and high-powered rifles, and demonstrators hurling stones, • molotov cocktails and pillboxes. By the time Marcos imposed martial law, the revolutionary movement had spread nationwide and established guerrilla zones in many areas. Meanwhile, in Mindanao, disputes over land between Christian settlers and increasingly displaced Muslims heated up. Paramilitary groups formed by Christian and Muslim warlords terrorized Muslim and Christian communities, respectively, killing mostly innocent civilians. After Marcos declared martial law, all hell broke loose in Mindanao. Muslim rebels called for independence from “Philippine colonialism.” The communist insurgency, the Muslim secessionist movement and the stormy protest rallies shattered the patron-client model’s tranquil landscape of an integrative multi-class, multi-ethnic society.

With its pyramid of vertical dyads, the patron-client framework presents a static, top-down picture of Philippine politics. Since a patron-client relationship involves two parties unequal in status, wealth and influence, Philippine politics is thus a pyramid of these lopsided relationships. The picture cannot show those who resist or try to break out of these unequal relationships. At best, they are aberrations. The problem is that in times of social tension, the aberrations become too numerous.

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<sup>75</sup> According to Iletto 2001, p. 20, Landé’s patron-client paradigm came out a time of anxiety over the threat of communism. Iletto argues that Landé’s model “ought to be seen in the context of mainly Marxist-nationalist challenges to the postwar construction of history and politics.”

Like the patron-client model, the neocolonial/dependency model depicts power, domination and control as flowing from top to bottom, i.e. from the U.S. to its puppet Marcos and his cabal, to their local cohorts and finally down to the masses. Yet resistance to the Marcos dictatorship built up through the years and culminated in the popular uprising of February 1986. Before that uprising, it would have seemed, from the neo-colonial perspective, that the U.S. would decide Marcos' political fate. In the case of the CPP, such thinking proved disastrous. Figuring, perhaps too mechanically, that the Reagan administration, which had been particularly supportive of the Marcos regime, would stick with the dictator all the way, the CPP boycotted the snap presidential elections. The CPP underestimated the strength of the popular forces and failed to see that the election would be the main channel for large-scale mobilization leading to a final showdown with the dictatorship. In the face of such massive opposition to Marcos, Reagan had no choice but to abandon his friend and ally. The revolutionary left ended up being left out of the "revolution" it claimed to lead.

The patrimonial/elite-democracy model is a pyramidal model too. Elite-democracy is a form of rule that follows a logical continuum of hierarchical politics dating back to the colonial era. Colonialism nurtured the domestic elite; "colonial democracy" reared them in the ways of patronage, manipulation and coercion.<sup>76</sup> Hence, it can be said that colonial rule and postcolonial elite rule are one continuous thread. At times, democratic structures and processes or the trappings of these partly or wholly masked their hierarchical nature. Both colonial rule and postcolonial elite rule, in fact, had "authoritarian" and "democratic" phases in them. The long colonial era included a long "authoritarian" Spanish rule, a brief experience with Spanish "colonial democracy," a short but extremely bloody American "authoritarian" period, a "golden era" of American "colonial democracy," an "authoritarian" Japanese occupation. The postcolonial era has had two democratic periods with an authoritarian sandwiched in between.

The patrimonial/elite-democracy interpretation of Philippine politics appears to be superior to the two other prominent interpretations, however. Unlike the patron-client model, it takes corruption, fraud, coercion and violence into account. And while the elite-democracy model may regard foreign interests as at times or often infringing on Philippine sovereignty, it does not have an exaggerated view – as the neocolonial model tends to have – of the power of these external forces to determine the course of political events in the country.

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<sup>76</sup> See Paredes 1988.

Although the patrimonial/elite-democracy framework has now gained ascendancy, it nonetheless has critical weaknesses. As another static, top-down model, the elite-democracy model tends to see what happens in the Philippines as mainly resulting from the actions and machinations of the elite – the corrupt caciques, predatory oligarchs and bosses – or factions of the elite. But elite action and intra-elite competition have not always been the decisive factor in shaping events. While actions of the opposition elite and the “Cory magic” certainly contributed to the downfall of Marcos in 1986, “people power,” not elite power or persona, was the decisive factor in the toppling of the corrupt dictator. Then again, in 2001, “people power” proved to be the most crucial element in ousting Estrada, another corrupt president.

The very terms “elite democracy,” “cacique democracy,” “oligarchic democracy,” “patrimonial oligarchic state,” “weak state, strong oligarchy” and “boss-rule” (or “boss-democracy”) do not portray or capture fully the real dynamics of Philippine politics. Many adherents of the patrimonial/elite-democracy framework, in fact, tend to minimize or virtually ignore the efforts of popular forces fighting against elite hegemony. “Nonoligarchic social forces,” writes Hutchcroft somewhat dismissively, “never seem to achieve the ‘critical mass’ necessary to force major overhaul of the system.”<sup>77</sup> Only in the very last paragraph of his book on bossism does Sidel acknowledge the hard work of NGO activists, investigative journalists and labor, peasant and urban poor organizers in resisting the predations of local bosses, adding that “[s]uch efforts are amply deserving of both attention and support.”<sup>78</sup>

Not all those who carry the elite politics theme, however, present a one-sided or lopsided view. Franco provides a more balanced picture and an integrated analysis of both elite rule and the popular opposition to it. To make sure that “clientelist electoral regime” does not appear as capturing the essence of political dynamics in pre- and post-authoritarian Philippines, she also presents social movement-based efforts at democratization. Franco’s account departs from the overly elite-centered depictions of Philippine politics in the general run of the patrimonial/elite-democracy model.

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<sup>77</sup> Hutchcroft 1998a, p. 54.

<sup>78</sup> Sidel 1999, p. 154.



## ***An Alternative Interpretation of Philippine Politics***

An alternative paradigm of “contested democracy” is more appropriate for explaining Philippine politics today. It takes into account not just the workings of elite politics but also the actions of forces from below, thus building on previous work by scholars like Kerkvliet, Franco and David Wurfel who have tried to encompass a fuller range of ideas, organizational bases and cleavages beyond the patron-client, neocolonial and elite-democracy approaches.

A contested democracy approach acknowledges that colonial rule and postcolonial elite rule constitute a single continuous seam in Philippine politics. Yet it contends that they are not the only important thread. The fight against hierarchical structures – the struggle for independence and for popular empowerment or “democracy from below” – is the other major running thread. The Filipinos’ yearning for independence was manifested in the many wars and battles fought by the native inhabitants against Spanish colonization; the numerous revolts waged against Spain; the revolution of 1896; the Filipino-American War and the Moro-American War; the campaign for Philippine independence; and the resistance against Japanese occupation. With the granting of independence in 1946, the efforts to assert Philippine sovereignty against foreign intervention or domination continued, but the focal point of the fight against hierarchy swung to social justice and popular empowerment against elite rule.

The two main strands in present-day Philippine politics – elite-democracy and “democracy from below” – represent two competing concepts of democracy. Elite-democracy, i.e., a truncated or deficient form of formal democracy in which the oligarchic elite dominates, is basically what the elite seeks to maintain. During the colonial period, the Philippine elite fought for independence and democracy, as did the lower classes. After the U.S. granted independence, members of the elite were all for elections and parliamentary government ... but not much more. The capitalists and landlords resisted demands for popular empowerment and social justice. When Marcos imposed martial law, large sections of the elite supported him, at least initially. “[T]hough alienated business elites helped to oust Marcos,” notes Case, “they afterward filled the presidency with one of their own, re-entered the Congress, and recaptured state agencies. They then thwarted the land reforms that had been mooted, as well as new deregulatory measures that threatened the Marcos-era

monopolies they had inherited.”<sup>79</sup> The behavior of the Philippine elite basically confirms the thesis of Huber et al. that classes benefiting from the status quo go as far as pushing for the installation (or restoration) of formal democracy – with deficiencies, at that – but resist moves for a more substantive one.

The caciques, oligarchs and bosses of the post-Marcos era basically ride on the minimalist concept of democracy equating democracy with elections. Such a concept is most useful and convenient for the elite for it allows them the greatest leeway to manipulate political structures and processes in their favor. Elections could well be regular and relatively free and fair – in general, candidates would be able to speak out, organize and assemble freely. To win an election, the elite politician could bank on his economic and political clout and take advantage of deferential patron-client ties, or, when he tires of the *compadrazgo* bit, simply resort to less personalistic forms of patronage. When this does not suffice, then perhaps vote-buying or a bit of pressure would do the trick. In extreme situations, the boss-politician could resort to the full regalia of “guns, goons and gold.” Once in power, the *trapo* makes the most of his position to further enrich himself and the oligarchs behind him through rents and plunder and to entrench himself.

Philippine postcolonial history has been marked by powerful movements with nascent elements of “democracy from below.” Peasant struggles for land reform have been at the core of the Huk rebellion and the Maoist insurgency, and the struggles of the Muslims against oppression and discrimination, at the core of the Muslim secessionist movement. The CPP’s armed struggle is now one of the world’s longest-running insurgencies. Fighting between the government and the insurgents has already claimed over 43,000 lives.<sup>80</sup> While many may abhor the CPP’s ends and means, the intensity and longevity of its armed struggle indicate the depth of popular opposition not just to Marcos’ authoritarian rule but also to elite rule in general. The struggle of the Muslims for self-determination has been even more intense than the communist insurgency. About 120,000 people have been killed in the armed conflict between the government and Muslim rebels, and over 200,000 forced to flee to Sabah.<sup>81</sup>

In the toppling of Marcos, too much credit has often been given to intra-elite conflict and too little to popular movements. Commendably, Franco showed the prominent role played by the grassroots movements in the broad resistance to the Marcos dictatorship. In the mid-1970s, long before the assassination of

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<sup>79</sup> Case 2002, p. 263.

<sup>80</sup> Cabreza 2003, p. 1.

Benigno Aquino, mass movements of workers, urban poor and students had already reawakened in Metro Manila. In 1980-81, tens of thousands of both rural and urban masses took to the streets all over the country, especially at the time of the March 1981 plebiscite and the May 1981 presidential election. The Aquino assassination in August 1983 sparked off what Franco called a “civic uprising” involving not just the popular forces but also large sections of the middle class and the opposition elite. The “people power” revolt of 1986 was primarily the culmination of the long struggle of popular forces against dictatorship, certainly not just the product of intra-elite competition.<sup>82</sup>

The long history of struggle of subordinate classes and marginalized communities for popular empowerment and social justice indicates that for many Filipinos, the minimalist concept of democracy could not suffice. Before and during Marcos’ authoritarian rule, however, “democracy from below” remained nascent and somewhat adulterated as the popular movements were influenced by Stalinist or Maoist parties that espoused “people’s democracy” or “national democracy,” a fig-leaf for one-party dictatorship. Since the fall of Marcos, the influence of doctrinaire Marxism has declined, and “democracy from below” has taken a less adulterated form. “Democracy from below” stresses greater popular participation in decision-making as well as social and economic equality, moving towards Huber et alia’s concept of participatory and social democracy and Laclau and Mouffe’s concept of radical and plural democracy. It has found organized expression in many “people’s organizations” (POs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and in the social movements, as well as in new political parties and groups that oppose elite and *trapo* politics and espouse “new politics.” The advocates of “democracy from below” aim to bring Philippine democracy much closer to the classical meaning of democracy, “rule by the people.” Democracy, in other words, is “people power.”

Nemenzo explains the clash between the two concepts of democracy as follows:

“Democracy” is the most abused word in the political vocabulary. It has been used to justify repression and elite rule. Lately, however, the narrow bourgeois definition that limits democracy to formal procedures for electing officials is being broadened in the usage of the popular movement. In the years to

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<sup>81</sup> Muslim and Cagoco-Guiam 1999, p. 16.

<sup>82</sup> Franco 2001, chapters 4-5.

come, the ideological struggle will revolve around the conflict between two notions of democracy: elite rule and people's power.<sup>83</sup>

In the sense that the very meaning and content of democracy are contested, "contested democracy" would be a more accurate interpretative framework of Philippine politics. The "contested democracy" framework remedies the static, one-sided and top-down view of the elite-democracy framework by integrating the "democracy from below" element. The oligarchs, caciques, bosses and *trapos* are still very dominant in Philippine politics, but their predatory rule has been challenged and continues to be challenged by the poor and marginalized.

The Philippines would easily fall under the category that Huber et al. describe as a "truncated" or "deficient" formal democracy, exhibiting such deficiencies as elections often marred by fraud and violence; patrimonial practices; uneven protection of civil and political rights; and weak accountability of elected officials. In the Philippine democratic deepening process, the contestation between the entrenched economic-political elite and the subordinate classes and marginalized communities is becoming a drawn-out struggle on the "missing" features or attributes of formal democracy and, more importantly, on more substantive democracy. As an alternative interpretation of Philippine politics, contested democracy graphically captures the dynamics and tensions within a deficient formal democracy that is seemingly unable to move forward.

### ***'Democracy from Below' and the Deepening of Philippine Democracy in the Post-Marcos Era***

The question of "democracy from below" – the efforts of forces identified with subordinate classes, communities and groups in Philippine society to bring about popular empowerment and social justice – has grown in urgency.

Corruption and plunder by the oligarchic elite have sapped the government's coffers and the country's resources. Neoliberal economic policies adopted over the last two decades by this very same elite (paradoxically, it may seem to some), under pressure from the IMF and the WB, have worsened the situation.

'Structural adjustment' programs, featuring export-oriented industrialization, liberalization, deregulation and privatization, have produced low and volatile growth, and widening poverty and inequalities. Over the past decade, the budget

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<sup>83</sup> Nemenzo 1996a, p. 56.

deficit and debt of the national government have reached such high levels that the Standard Chartered Bank of London has warned of a possible Argentina-type economic collapse of the Philippines.<sup>84</sup> Identifying the budget deficit as the country's most urgent problem, President Arroyo has faulted corrupt businessmen for being the worst tax offenders and for promoting a culture of tax evasion.<sup>85</sup> Eleven economists of the University of the Philippines lay the blame on large taxpayers, and also on the three main branches of the government for their inaction or for abetting tax evaders.<sup>86</sup> Bello, Lidy Nacpil and Ana Marie Nemenzo cite the unilateral trade liberalization program pursued by neoliberal technocrats and the never ending and rising payments to foreign creditors as among the key culprits.<sup>87</sup> Thanks to booty capitalism and neoliberalism, the Philippines has degenerated from being Asia's second most developed postwar economy to being the region's "sick man." Over the past 30 years, the Philippines' annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth has averaged a mere 3.1 per cent, about half the rate of other Asian countries.<sup>88</sup>

The Philippines is now perhaps one of the world's worst class-divided societies, a country in which a small percentage of the population controls the country's economic resources, while the great majority remain mired in poverty. The country is now rated as Southeast Asia's most elitist.<sup>89</sup> Despite land reform, landholding became more concentrated between 1960 and 1990. The gap between the rich and the poor, instead of narrowing, has turned into a more gaping chasm. In 1957, the country's richest 20 percent received 7.5 times the share of the poorest 20 percent of the population; in 2000, this grew to 12.4 times.<sup>90</sup> Worse, the "beautiful people" flaunt their wealth and power, even as some of the urban poor scavenge and live in garbage dumpsites, amid all the filth, stench and fumes.<sup>91</sup> The Filipino worker's minimum wage – a pittance P280

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<sup>84</sup> Bello, Nacpil and Nemenzo 2004, p. 1. The budget deficit of the national government soared from less than 1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1995 to 5.2 per cent in 2002; its debt, from P1.2 trillion or 61 percent of GDP in 1995 to P3.4 trillion or 77 per cent in 2003 (Buenaventura 2004, p. 1).

<sup>85</sup> Arroyo 2004, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> De Dios, et al. 2004, p. 6.

<sup>87</sup> Bello, Nacpil and Nemenzo 2004, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Wallace 2004, p. 1. The 30-year average GDP growth rates of selected Asian countries are as follows: China, 7.8%; Korea, 6.4%; Singapore, 6.3%; Malaysia, 5.9%; Thailand, 5.7%; Indonesia, 5.3%; and Philippines, 3.1%.

<sup>89</sup> Bierling and Lafferty 1998, pp. 282-3.

<sup>90</sup> Gerson 1998, pp. 46-9; <http://www.panasia.org.sg/mimapph/mimapdb09.htm>.

<sup>91</sup> According to G. Clarke and Marites Sison, members of the Filipino elite perceive poverty as arising from such factors as the unequal distribution of wealth, corruption and "traditional" politics. While blaming the "elite" for these problems, they do not see themselves as being part of this elite. "The Filipino elite," note Clarke and Sison, "feel a sense of responsibility towards the poor, but this responsibility is met through the

– contrasts with the whopping P6.1 million a day that Estrada raked in from illegal gambling in May 1999–November 2000. (Estrada’s loot of \$78 to \$80 million pales in comparison, of course, to the \$5 to \$10 billion that Marcos amassed in twenty years of being in power, as estimated by Transparency International.)<sup>92</sup> The Muslims of Mindanao and other minority ethnic communities, many of whom have already been displaced from their ancestral lands, continue to be treated like second-class citizens. To make their families to live more decently or to provide a good education for their siblings or children, hundreds of thousands of Filipinos have had to seek jobs abroad, many becoming victims of abuses and human trafficking. The Philippines has become the world’s “largest migrant nation.”<sup>93</sup>

For those whose attention became glued, since the 1986 “people power” uprising, to the actions and manipulations of the oligarchs and *trapos*, the ouster of Estrada through People Power II (or EDSA II) served as a reminder that “democracy from below” is still very much the other running thread in Philippine politics. Some Western observers waxed critical of “people power,” with one even commenting that “ousting presidents by revolution has become a bad national habit” and that “people power” was nothing more than “mob rule.”<sup>94</sup> What these observers did not seem to fathom is that a lot of democratic processes and structures – from the political party system to mechanisms for horizontal accountability and even to rule of law – have not yet been institutionalized, that they have remained such because *trapos* want to leave them that way for easy manipulation, and that sometimes the only recourse the people have to check the abuses of the predatory elite is direct action.

Even EDSA III was to a significant extent a protest against elite politics. Most of the “great unwashed”<sup>95</sup> who gathered at EDSA in support of the deposed Estrada and later attacked Malacanang Palace came from the poorest of the poor. They harbored deep resentment against the rich and felt alienated from all the dirt and hypocrisy of *trapo* politics. While “people power” did oust two corrupt presidents, one should nonetheless avoid taking a romanticized view of the

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provision of assistance on a patron-client basis or through philanthropic activity, rather than a more substantive commitment to redistributive action led by the state.” (Clarke and Sison 2003, p. 237.)

<sup>92</sup> Doronila 2004, p. 1. The Philippines is the only country with two leaders included in the list of the world’s ten most corrupt leaders in the 2004 Global Corruption Report of the Berlin-based Transparency International (TI). Ferdinand Marcos placed second; Joseph Estrada ranked 10th.

<sup>93</sup> Avendaño 2000, p. 1.

<sup>94</sup> Spaeth 2001, p. 22.

<sup>95</sup> According to Schaffer 2001, p. 4, this is how (certain) columnists in the Philippines’ English-language newspapers have referred to the poor.

Filipino masses. Not all explosions of protest involving large numbers of the masses can be regarded as genuine manifestations of “people power.” Given the long-standing role of patron-client ties in Philippine politics, large numbers of them remain vulnerable to clientelism and populism. Throughout his long reel and political life, Estrada had shrewdly cultivated the image of being a man for the downtrodden. Estrada victimized the poor he was supposed to be championing not just through patronage and corruption, but also through the socially inequitable neoliberal agenda he pursued as president. Sadly, clientelist-populist appeals still worked at EDSA III.

Thanks to People Power I, the Philippines is probably one of the first countries where the term “people [or popular] empowerment” has become widely accepted. It has come to be very much associated with POs/NGOs and with social movements. Mushrooming all over the country, societal organizations have ventured into a wide array of concerns. The Philippines is now reputed to have the third largest NGO community in the developing world behind Brazil and India, and probably the world’s highest NGO density.<sup>96</sup> Many of the POs/NGOs are at the core of various social movements, which have waged campaigns on land reform, labor relations reform, women’s rights, the peace process, U.S. military presence, globalization, issues of overseas Filipinos, etc. A growing number have ventured into development work and promoted “people’s participation in governance,” challenging traditional, top-down approaches.

Not to be discounted in such a class-divided country as the Philippines are forms of everyday resistance by ordinary people in rural villages and urban poor communities against the elite, capitalists and the government. Through forms that are often non-confrontational, indirect and somewhat hidden, the poor resist the claims on them by the rich and the powers-that-be and assert their own claims on what they believe rightfully belongs to them. This happens even in situations where serenity and harmony seem to prevail. Examples of everyday resistance against the rich include making jokes or uttering insulting remarks out of earshot; secretly taking rice or tools; foot-dragging, or taking flight. As noted by Kerkvliet, such non-confrontational, indirect forms have sometimes served as the basis, in combination with other circumstances, for organized confrontational resistance.<sup>97</sup> In a study of the rise and decline of the ND revolutionary movement in Davao in the 1980s, Christopher Collier found that an indigenous idiom of exploitation and oppression with deep cultural and

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<sup>96</sup> Clarke 1998a, p. 193; Hilhorst 2003, p. 11.

<sup>97</sup> Kerkvliet 1990, pp. 16-17, 244-7; Kerkvliet 1995, p. 418.

spiritual roots – a “little tradition” of everyday resistance – resonated quite well with the language of the ND movement. He contended, however, that the privileging of the “great tradition” of “Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought” over vernacular expressions of resistance eventually prevented their organic articulation into what Gramsci had called a “collective national-popular will”.<sup>98</sup>

Of late, the adherents of “democracy from below” have ventured into the main playing field of the elite, an arena whose ins and outs, modus and tricks, the oligarchs have so mastered in over a century of experience – elections. Doing battle with the *trapos* in the electoral arena follows a simple logic. Explosions of “people power” and a strong and vibrant civil society are not enough. Of what value are they if oligarchs and *trapos* still call the shots and make a mess of people’s lives? Since the approval of the party-list system in 1995, PO/NGO-based forces have built new political parties representing marginalized sectors. Fledgling “new politics” parties like Akbayan, ABA-AKO, AMIN, *Partido ng Manggagawa* and Sanlakas have managed to win congressional seats and/or a number of local government posts.

Contested democracy, as an alternative paradigm of Philippine politics, highlights the element of agency, apart from contestation. Formal liberal democracy, despite deficiencies, provides the opportunity for subordinate classes and communities to push for popular empowerment, and further, for a more equitable distribution of the country’s wealth, and ultimately bring about a stable, more participatory and egalitarian democracy. Towards that end, one can expect in the years to come more expressions and explosions of that “bad national habit” – “people power.”

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<sup>98</sup> Collier 1997, pp. 283, 292.



## *Chapter II*

# **Threat to Democracy or Democratizing Force?**

In the Philippines, the left has long been the only major organized political force challenging the rule of the oligarchic elite. In many quarters, however, the left has been viewed mainly as constituting a threat to democracy, or during Marcos' authoritarian rule, an impediment to the restoration of democracy. This is perhaps a result of the government's intense counter-insurgency campaigns against armed communist or "leftist" (read: communist) movements since the 1940s. Although the Philippine left actually includes many parties and groups, the terms *left* and *leftist* have been commonly associated with the communists. The appraisal of the communists as being mainly a threat to democracy appears to be contradicted or at least modulated by some scholars who have portrayed it in a somewhat more positive light, either as having taken the lead in the development of non-state political space,<sup>1</sup> having been in the forefront of the anti-dictatorship movement,<sup>2</sup> or having contributed to peaceful democratic transition, albeit in an ironic or curious way.<sup>3</sup> Ten years after Marcos' fall, however, a number of political observers dismissed the left, i.e., the communists, as being a declining threat, or even as a mere military nuisance.<sup>4</sup> Some of those who have viewed the communists somewhat sympathetically, however, also consider it as virtually being a spent force. It has been said, for instance, that the left in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, had lost its

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<sup>1</sup> Hewison and Rodan 1996, p. 43. Hewison and Rodan focused only on the modern countries of Southeast Asia – Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines.

<sup>2</sup> Rocamora 1994a, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson 1998b, p. 277; Wurfel 1990, p. 130.

<sup>4</sup> Alagappa 1995, p. 31; Thompson 1996, p. 195.

“accustomed position as a strategic leader in the struggle for civil society,” and declined.<sup>5</sup>

The contention that the Philippine left has in the main been a threat to democracy is premised on the fact that Filipino communists have been involved in two major insurgencies aimed at overthrowing the Philippine republican state, and that their proffered alternative has been patterned after the one-party dictatorships of the Soviet Union or China. The PKP figured prominently in the Huk rebellion of the late 1940s and early 1950s. In the late 1960s, the Maoist CPP launched a revolutionary armed struggle, which is still ongoing, now one of the world’s longest-running insurgencies. The assessment that the Philippine left is now but a paper tiger, on the other hand, is largely based on the fact that the CPP, together with the CPP-aligned ND movement, has gone through a long and deep crisis triggered by their being left out of the “people power” uprising in 1986 and culminating in a highly acrimonious internal party struggle and split in 1992-93.

Has the Philippine left been a democratizing force or has it been a threat to democracy? Whichever it is, does it continue to be so? Has the left truly been a strategic leader in the struggle for civil society? And is it indeed in decline and become a marginalized force?

In this chapter, I put forward three points regarding the left and democratization in the Philippines. First, the Philippine left, far from being a spent force, has made a certain degree of recovery in recent years. Secondly, the traditional left – the communist movement – has exhibited both democratic and undemocratic features, but has been more of an undemocratic than a democratic or democratizing force. Its instrumentalization of POs/NGOs and the social movements negate its supposed leading role in the struggle for civil society. And lastly, while the CPP remains a threat to Philippine democracy, new left parties and groups that are more democratically oriented have emerged and they are now making an earnest bid to challenge the *trapos* in the state arena – elections and governance. In the Philippines’ contested democracy, the emergent left parties are endeavoring to become true representatives of “democracy from below.”

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<sup>5</sup> Hewison and Rodan 1996, pp. 43, 66.

## *The Philippine Left*

The term *left* has generally been used to refer to those who want change, favor more equality and resort to non-traditional, even radical or revolutionary means. For Hewison and Rodan, the common denominator of the left is “an emphasis on alternatives to the individualism of market relationships and a commitment to values which advance public and collective interests.”<sup>6</sup> In the Philippines, the term *left* has been associated with communist, socialist and social democratic (SD) movements, parties, groups and currents. In the light of the country’s colonial history, Philippine leftists have strongly opposed colonial, “neocolonial” and “imperialist” rule or “foreign interference” in the country’s political, economic and cultural life. While Philippine leftists generally refer to themselves as the left and are also regarded by other political forces as such, there appears to be no general consensus on who comprise the right and the center. The left has tended to view all the major electoral parties as rightist, but none of these parties bill themselves as such and have tended to avoid using the right, center or left labels for themselves.

The oldest left party in the Philippines is the PKP, which was founded in November 1930 amid growing peasant and labor unrest. The party, headed by labor leader Crisanto Evangelista, set as its objectives the “immediate, complete and absolute independence of the Philippines from the U.S., overthrow of American imperialism and domestic capital, betterment of living and working conditions of the working class, and establishment of a Soviet government in the country.”<sup>7</sup> Less than a year after the PKP’s founding, the American colonial regime declared it an illegal organization. A thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations in the face of the threat of fascism led to a lifting of the ban in the late 1930s. In March 1938, the PKP merged with the peasant-based Socialist Party of the Philippines (SPP), which was strong in Central Luzon, a hotbed of agrarian unrest. During the Japanese occupation (1942-45), the PKP and its allies formed *Hukbo ng Bayan laban sa mga Hapon* (Hukbalahap) or People’s Anti-Japanese Army – Huks, for short – which waged guerrilla war against the Japanese. After the war, the PKP, together with other progressive<sup>8</sup> groups, established the Democratic Alliance (DA), which fielded some candidates in the first postwar elections.

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<sup>6</sup> Hewison and Rodan 1996, p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> Saulo 1990, p. 174.

<sup>8</sup> In this dissertation, I use the term *progressive* to refer to a person or group of persons who resist arbitrary power (derived from wealth, family ties or bureaucratic position) and who promote or support new ideas and social change.

Machinations of the Roxas administration barred six DA congressmen-elect, all from Central Luzon, from assuming their posts. Agrarian tensions in Central Luzon heated up once again, finally exploding into the Huk rebellion, with veterans of the Hukbalahap serving as the core of the *Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* (HMB) or People's Liberation Army. After the defeat of the Huk rebellion, the PKP shifted to parliamentary struggle. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the PKP revived to some extent. Two years after the declaration of martial law, the PKP entered into a "national unity agreement" with Marcos, which proved politically costly. Marcos did release PKP political prisoners and grant amnesty to party members, but he did not substantially implement promised reforms, especially land reform,<sup>9</sup> nor allow PKP-aligned mass organizations to operate freely. The PKP lost many members and supporters. Towards the end of authoritarian rule, the PKP became more critical of Marcos and again revived briefly. Since the fall of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, the PKP has become moribund.

Still widely considered as the biggest single bloc within the Philippine left is the CPP and the CPP-aligned ND movement. A group of mostly young communists established the CPP in December 1968. Jose Maria Sison, who had broken away from the "pro-Soviet" PKP, became its chairman. Denouncing "U.S. imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism," the new party called for the revolutionary overthrow of the "reactionary" Philippine state. As an alternative to the "semicolonial and semifeudal" order, the CPP vowed to establish a "national democracy" or "people's democracy," an intermediate stage to socialism. Shortly after the party's founding, some ex-Huks, led by Bernabe Buscayno, who were looking for alliances with workers, students and progressive liberals, managed to link up with Sison. Thus, in March 1969, the new communist party came to have a guerrilla army, the New People's Army (NPA).<sup>10</sup> The CPP-NPA immediately launched Mao-style "protracted people's war." The ND network includes the "revolutionary united front" – National Democratic Front (NDF) – and thousands of open, legal ND organizations grouped under the coalition *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (Bayan) or New Patriotic Alliance.

The NDs first burst into the limelight in the early 1970s, when ND activists seized the initiative during the upsurge of the youth and student

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<sup>9</sup> In 1972, Marcos promised almost one million hectares of tenanted rice and corn lands for redistribution. By the time of his ouster, he had accomplished only ten per cent of this target (Borras 1998, p. 40).

<sup>10</sup> Tornquist 1991, p. 1684. Official CPP documents declare that the CPP founded the NPA, but it was actually Buscayno's guerrilla band that *found* the CPP.

movement, which soon turned into more generalized protests of the country's lower classes and marginalized sectors. Through their militance, zeal and organizational skill, the NDs spread throughout the archipelago. When Marcos imposed martial law in September 1972, the CPP/NPA immediately called for intensifying the armed struggle. In the early years, the Marcos dictatorship arrested, tortured, detained or killed thousands of ND cadres and activists were. In time, however, the movement adjusted to the repressive conditions and began an all-sided advance. Guerrilla zones were set up in almost all strategic mountainous areas. The urban mass movement revived and developed. The ND movement peaked during the first half of the 80s. The NDs, operating both underground and aboveground, proved to be the biggest, most organized and most militant force within the broad anti-Marcos movement. The NDs, however, committed a grave error in the homestretch. Failing to see that a decisive showdown with the dictatorship loomed, the ND forces campaigned for a boycott of the 1986 "snap" presidential elections. Thus they boxed themselves out of the "people power" uprising that toppled Marcos and swept Corazon Aquino into the presidency. In the wake of the boycott fiasco, a furious debate ensued within the CPP and ND ranks. The NDs' image, sullied by the boycott error, was further tarnished by revelations of excesses committed in several "anti-infiltration campaigns," in which hundreds of cadres, activists and guerrillas suspected of being government spies were arrested, tortured and executed.

In 1987, the NDs participated in elections for the first time, fielding candidates in the first post-Marcos congressional elections. Taking on the *trapos*, the ND electoral party, *Partido ng Bayan* (PnB or People's Party), campaigned on a platform of "new politics." It was badly thrashed – all its senatorial candidates lost, and only two congressional bets won.

The ND movement declined. Membership dipped, guerrilla zones contracted, and disagreements within the CPP deepened. By the late 1980s, revolutionary strategy became the main bone of contention within the party. There were those who adhered to the Maoist version of "protracted people's war," which stressed the primacy of armed struggle over the mass movement. Others favored the Vietnamese version, which put "political struggle" – ranging from open legal struggle to insurrection – on the same footing as armed or military struggle. And still others pushed for a Nicaragua-style "insurrectional strategy," in which guerrilla warfare played a secondary role to the "insurrectional mass

## The Debate within the CPP on the Fall of Socialism in Eastern Europe and on the Alternative Philippine Society

	<b>'Reaffirmists'</b>	<b>'Rejectionists'</b>
<b>Cause of downfall of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union</b>	<p>EE countries were no longer socialist; they had turned capitalist. Ruling communist parties in EE had fallen into <b>'revisionism'</b> (i.e., turned against the basic principles of Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao*)</p> <p>*'Basic principles':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• central planning; state ownership of factories, etc.</li> <li>• 'people's democracy' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– democratic centralism</li> <li>– CPP as vanguard party</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>EE countries had developed a distorted form of socialism: <b>Stalinism.*</b></p> <p>*'Stalinist distortions':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'command economy'</li> <li>• one-party dictatorship</li> </ul>
<b>Rectification</b>	Reaffirm basic principles of Marx, etc.; combat 'revisionism'	Reject Stalinism
<b>Vision of an alternative society in the Philippines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central planning; state ownership of factories, etc.</li> <li>• 'People's democracy' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– democratic centralism</li> <li>– CPP as vanguard party</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed economy.</li> <li>• Pluralist democracy.</li> </ul>

A major issue of debate within the CPP has to do with the causes of the debacle of the Soviet and Eastern European regimes, the roots of the current crisis of socialism. One contention is that it was due to "the gradual though steady and ultimately successful restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe" and the transformation of the communist parties there into modern "revisionist" parties. The counter-argument is that socialism's crisis resulted from "what its proponents call the Stalinist distortions of the socialist system or the institutionalization of the command-administrative set-up in the economy, politics, culture and ideology of socialist society" ("Where To Socialism?", *Ang Bayan*,

January-February 1991, p. 18). Hence, it can be said that the main divide on the question of the roots of socialism's crisis is between those who see the main culprit as "revisionism" and those who put the blame on "Stalinism."

The debate on the vision of an alternative society logically follows from that on the roots of socialism's crisis. One side believes that since the "revision" of the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism has been the main problem, the CPP should go back to the basic teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. Hence, the economic alternative envisaged is one in which the state sector plays a nearly all-encompassing role and private enterprise, a minor one. The alternative political system proposed is that of a "people's democracy" patterned after that of the People's Republic of China in Mao's time. It must be noted that Mao's concept of "people's democracy" is premised on the concept of the "people's democratic dictatorship," which is actually Mao's version of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" for underdeveloped countries. In the people's democratic dictatorship concept, there is supposed to be democracy for the people, specifically workers, peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and the "national bourgeoisie," and they exercise dictatorship over the landlords and the big bourgeoisie. The leading role in such a state is exercised by the "advanced detachment of the proletariat," meaning the communist party.

Since the anti-Stalinists see Stalinism as the root of socialism's crisis, their view of an alternative society veers away from the Stalinist model. The anti-Stalinists envisage a mixed economy in which the private sector continues to play a significant role in economic development. Instead of putting great stress on the state role, they emphasize democratizing property ownership, deconcentrating wealth and promoting broad cooperative forms of production. They further envisage a type of democracy that includes grassroots participation and empowerment, competed elections, the rule of law and accountability of the state.

The anti-Stalinists want a pluralist democracy in which no single political group monopolizes political power. They object to having the vanguard role of the CPP in an ND society pre-ordained and fixed. In the first place, they argue, the old vanguardist notion of a proletarian party keeping mass social movements under close control in conformity with its revolutionary line and program is obsolete. Besides, leadership is something earned and must always subject to a popular mandate. A pre-defined vanguard role for the CPP in the ND state prevents the establishment of a truly pluralist democracy.

The vanguard question has spilled over to Party-NDF relations. Anti-revisionists believe that the 1990 NDF Constitution and Program have very much diluted the Party's leading role. [CPP chairman Armando] Liwanag (Jose Ma. Sison), hence, has drafted a new NDF program and constitution, which explicitly declare the leading role of the "vanguard of the proletariat," meaning the CPP, and discard the federation concept of the NDF. Anti-Stalinists object, claiming that enshrining the vanguard role for the Party in the NDF constitution paves the way for enshrining a similar vanguard role in the constitution of an ND state.

*(Excerpt from: Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, "The Debate in the CPP-NDF and Its Implications on the Peace Process," paper presented at a Philippine solidarity conference sponsored by the Philippinenburo, 13 March 1993, in Frankfurt, Germany.)*

movement.”<sup>11</sup> Unresolved differences on strategy and tactics and on internal democracy were compounded, following the collapse of socialist states in Eastern Europe, by disagreements on the causes of the crisis of socialism and the vision of an alternative society. The main divide regarding the roots of socialism’s crisis was between those who saw “revisionism” (i.e., departure from the “fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought”) as being the main culprit, and those who put the blame on “Stalinism.” The “anti-revisionists” visualized an alternative Philippine society that would adhere to the basic Maoist model featuring central planning and state ownership of the main means of production, and a “people’s democratic dictatorship” with the CPP as the vanguard party. Viewing the “command economy” and the “one-party dictatorship” as “Stalinist distortions,” the anti-Stalinists envisaged a “mixed economy” and a “pluralist democracy.”<sup>12</sup> (See Annex A on pp. 60-61.)

The debates came to a head in early 1992, when Sison put out a document entitled “Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify the Errors,” in which he lashed out at those who had “deviated” from the party’s line, blamed them for errors of “urban insurrectionism” and “military adventurism,” and called for a “reaffirmation” of basic Maoist doctrines.<sup>13</sup> After an intense and acrimonious ideological struggle, the party split into “reaffirmists” and “rejectionists.” Sison won over the majority of the national party leadership and of the regional committees. In twenty-five years, quips Weekley, the CPP “moved from the vanguard to the rearguard of radical politics.”<sup>14</sup>

Several communist or workers’ parties have emerged from the ranks of the “rejectionists,” all of which now claim to reject Maoism and Stalinism.<sup>15</sup> (See Annex B on p. 63 for a matrix of major left parties in the Philippines.) The most prominent are: *Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa – Pilipinas* (RPM-P) or Revolutionary Workers Party, which was formally established in May 1998 and originally consisted of former units of the CPP’s Visayas Commission and some cadres from the former Manila-Rizal Regional Committee; *Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino* (PMP) or Filipino Workers’ Party, set up in January 1999, which now has the main chunk of the CPP’s former Manila-Rizal

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<sup>11</sup> For a more elaborate discussion of the three strategic frameworks, see Tupaz 1991. “Omar Tupaz” was one of the pseudonyms I used when I was still in the CPP.

<sup>12</sup> The “rejectionists” viewed a “mixed economy” as an intermediate stage prior to socialism.

<sup>13</sup> Liwanag 1992, pp. 83-133.

<sup>14</sup> Weekley 2001, p. 259.

<sup>15</sup> The “rejectionist” groups were not a homogeneous lot. Although they all repudiated Stalinism and Maoism, they disagreed on strategy and tactics, analysis of the Philippine state, etc.



(Source: Interviews and discussions with leaders of left parties)

## Major Left Parties in the Philippines

Communist/National Democratic (ND) Tradition		Social Democratic (SD) Tradition	
Marxist-Leninist-Maoist	Marxist-Leninist	"Mixed" (ND/SD/ Independent) Tradition	Socialist
<i>Underground party:</i> CPP (Communist Party of the Philippines)	<i>Underground party:</i> PMP (Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas)	<i>Legal party:</i> Akbayan (Citizens' Action Party) - Formed by 4 political blocs: • Popular democrats (ND trad.) • Bisig (Independent socialist) • Pandayan (SD trad.) • Siglaya (ND trad.)	<i>Legal party:</i> ABA/AKO (Alyansang Bayanihan ng mga Magsasaka, Manggagawang-Bukid at Mangangisda / Adhikain at Kilusan ng Ordinaryong Tao) - Merger of a peasants' party with an urban poor party.
<i>Guerrilla army:</i> NPA (New People's Army)	<i>Guerrilla army:</i> None		
<i>Allied legal party:</i> Bayan Muna, Anakpawis, Gabriela	<i>Allied legal parties:</i> PM (Partido ng Manggagawa); Sanlakas		
<i>Underground party:</i> MLPP (Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines)	<i>Underground party:</i> RPM-P* (Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa - Pilipinas)		<i>Legal party:</i> Abanse Pinay - A women's party
<i>Guerrilla army:</i> RHB (Rebolusyonaryong Hukbong Bayan)	<i>Guerrilla army:</i> RPA-ABB (Revolutionary People's Army - Alex Boncayao Brigade)		
<i>Allied legal party:</i> None	<i>Allied legal party:</i> Atin		
	<i>Underground party:</i> RPM-M* (Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa - Mindanao)		
	<i>Guerrilla army:</i> RPA-M (Revolutionary People's Army - Mindanao)		
	<i>Allied legal party:</i> AMIN (Anak-Mindanao)		

\* Peace negotiations with the Philippine government ongoing. RPM-P has signed preliminary agreements with the government on "confidence-building" measures.

Committee and National United Front Commission;<sup>16</sup> and *Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa – Mindanao* (RPM-M), the CPP's former Central Mindanao Regional Committee and now a section of the Fourth International, whose attempted fusion with RPM-P forces fell through. Somewhat allied with the "rejectionists" is the *Marxista-Leninistang Partido ng Pilipinas* (MLPP), which was originally with the "reaffirmists" – part of the CPP's Central Luzon regional organization – but which bolted out of the CPP in late 1997. RPM-P, RPM-M and MLPP have guerrilla groups, but only MLPP is still actively engaged in armed struggle. RPM-P has signed an initial peace agreement with the government and RPM-M is engaged in peace talks. The electoral party *Partido ng Manggagawa* (PM) or Workers' Party, and the multisectoral alliance Sanlakas are aligned with PMP; Alab-Katipunan, with RPM-P; Anak-Mindanao (AMIN), with RPM-M; *Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya* (KPD) or the Movement for Nationalism and Democracy, with MLPP.

The *Partido Demokratiko Sosyalista ng Pilipinas* (PDSP) is the main SD party in the Philippines. It is headed by Norberto Gonzales, Jr., who currently sits in the Arroyo Cabinet as national security adviser. The SD movement emerged in the Philippines in the late 1960s when young activists and progressive churchpeople belonging to reformist organizations saw the need not just to address the country's social ills but also to check the spread of communism. In the early 1970s, the SDs competed with the NDs for the leadership of the social movements. After Marcos imposed martial law, the SDs, alarmed that all channels for legitimate dissent were being closed off, contemplated armed resistance. PDSP was established in May 1973 with Gonzalez and Jesuit priest Romeo Intengan as its top leaders.<sup>17</sup> The new party described itself as "nationalist, democratic, socialist, revolutionary." Its basic ideological foundation was "authentic humanism," which emphasized the essential equality among human beings, the social nature of man and the universal purpose of property. In 1976, PDSP set up an armed group, Sandigan, which engaged in guerrilla actions in Southern Tagalog and Southeastern Mindanao.<sup>18</sup> In the 1978 elections for the Interim *Batasang Pambansa* (IBP), Marcos' parliament, the SDs managed to wrest control of the campaign machinery of the broad opposition alliance, *Lakas ng Bayan* (Laban) or Strength

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<sup>16</sup> PMP is an enlarged party, after the merger of the original PMP with the *Partido Proletaryo Demokratiko* (PPD) or Democratic Proletarian Party, and the *Sosyalistang Partido ng Paggawa* (SPP) or Socialist Workers' Party in August 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Hofileña 2002a, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Sandigan was disbanded after the fall of Marcos.

of the People from the NDs.<sup>19</sup> Shortly after, however, differences in strategy and tactics and in the “no alliance with the CPP” policy led two factions to pull out of PDSP.<sup>20</sup> In 1982, some SDs coming mostly from Mindanao, together with their allies, established *Partido ng Demokratikong Pilipino* (PDP), a legal, grassroots-based and reform-oriented party that espoused a “democratic socialist” ideology. Lacking national projection, PDP merged with LABAN, which was dominated by more well-known and seasoned politicians, the following year. It soon lost its character as a non-traditional party.<sup>21</sup> The SDs expanded rapidly once again with the groundswell of the anti-dictatorship movement following the assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino in 1983. When many allies of the NDs withdrew from Bayan in 1985, the SDs organized a rival coalition, *Bansang Nagkaisa sa Diwa at Layunin* (Bandila) or Nation United in Spirit and Purpose. The SDs campaigned for Corazon Aquino in the 1986 polls and took active part in the “people power” uprising. For their role at EDSA, some SD leaders were appointed to government positions. SD formations such as *Pandayan para sa Sosyalistang Pilipinas* (Pandayan) or Forging a Socialist Philippines and *Kapulungan ng mga Sandigan ng Pilipinas* (Kasapi) or Assembly of Pillars of the Philippines intensified their organizing efforts at the grassroots and among students and professionals. In November 1988, PDSP, Pandayan, Kasapi and other SD groups forged the *Demokratikong-Sosyalistang Koalisyon* (DSK). This quickly fell apart, however, as Pandayan and Kasapi increasingly resented PDSP’s attempts at “domination” and its being “coopted” by the government. Although the PDSP regards itself as being a left party, other left parties and groups no longer consider it to be such and in fact see it as being just another *trapo* party.<sup>22</sup>

Two new parties come from the SD tradition: the ABA-AKO coalition and *Abanse Pinay* (Advance Filipina). ABA-AKO is the coalition of a peasant party-list organization – *Alyansang Bayanihan ng mga Magsasaka, Manggagawang-Bukid at Mangingisda* (ABA), or the Cooperative Alliance of Peasants, Farm Workers and Fishers – and an urban poor organization – *Adhikain at Kilusan ng Ordinaryong Tao* (AKO), or Aspirations and Movement of the Common People. It seeks “to liberate the peasantry and the urban poor from the shackles of domination, exploitation and oppression through enactment of appropriate

<sup>19</sup> *Partido Demokratiko Sosyalista ng Pilipinas* 1982, pp. 6-8, 19-20.

<sup>20</sup> Rosenberg 1984, p. 44; Political Forces Study Group 1989, pp. 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> Gutierrez 1994b, pp. 99-100; Abao 1997, p. 277.

<sup>22</sup> Stated by Lidy Nacpil, executive director of Freedom from Debt Coalition, in a forum on “Strategic Left Frameworks for Social Change” in Quezon City, 5 November 2003.

legislative measures.”<sup>23</sup> ABA’s leaders are identified with the Federation of Free Farmers, the biggest confederation of peasant organizations in the pre-martial law era. Abanse Pinay is a party-list organization that aims to advance women’s rights and welfare, to “mainstream” women in politics and to fight for legislation that address gender and women’s concerns.<sup>24</sup>

Akbayan is a mix of various progressive groups and political tendencies. Four political blocs were involved in its formal establishment in January 1998, namely: *Bukluran para sa Ikauunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa* (Bisig), or Federation for the Advancement of Socialist Theory and Praxis, which consisted of ex-PKP members, ex-NDs, ex-SDs, Christian socialists and “non-aligned” activists who wanted to develop a socialist program distinct from that of the NDs and the SDs; the SD group Pandayan; the “popular democrats” or “popdems,” a tendency within the ND movement that sought to put emphasis on “popular empowerment” after EDSA I; and *Siglo ng Paglaya* (Siglaya) or Century of Freedom, a “rejectionist” group which characterized itself as the “democratic bloc” of the ND movement.<sup>25</sup> Siglaya has since broken up; a section of it now called Padayon has taken its place in Akbayan. The popdems dissolved themselves as a political bloc in 1999.

### ***The Revival of the Left***

In arguing that the left in modern Southeast Asia has lost its leading position in the struggle for civil society, Hewison and Rodan attribute its decline to the “economic triumph of capitalism” in the region, which stands in contrast to “the negative example of state-led socialist experiments around the world.” Another factor cited is the de-linking of nationalism from socialism and the successful appropriation of nationalist ideology for capitalist development in the region. A range of liberals and social reformers coming from new social forces

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<sup>23</sup> Commission on Elections 2004, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Jimenez-David 2003, p. 5; Sarenas 1999, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Abao 1997, p. 271. In 1992, Bisig, Pandayan and the popdems forged a loose, non-party alliance called *Kaakbay ng Sambayanan* (Akbayan) or Ally of the People, that supported the unsuccessful presidential bid of Senator Jovito Salonga. When the three groups and Siglaya banded together to form a new party in 1995-6, they named it *Aksyon*. The new party had to drop *Aksyon*, however, as a political party headed by former senator Raul Roco, had registered ahead of it with the name *Aksyon Demokratiko*. Instead of *Aksyon*, the name of the new left party became Akbayan. Not all of Pandayan’s members nor all of the popdems joined Akbayan. Some Pandayan members joined the Liberal Party, ABA and AKO. A section of the popdems established a separate party-list group called *Pinag-isang Lakas sa Pagbabago* (Pinatubo), or Consolidated Power for Change, which fielded

belonging to different classes – bourgeois, middle and working classes – is said to have taken the place of communists and socialists in leading the development of civil society. Hewison and Rodan cite NGOs, whose personnel are often drawn from the middle classes, as being among the “new political oppositions” and as being critical avenues for expanding non-state political space.<sup>26</sup> Some scholars credit the middle class as the main bearers of democratization, even characterizing People Power I and II as middle class revolts.<sup>27</sup>

In the case of the Philippines, Hewison and Rodan may have spoken a bit too soon. Through the late 1980s and most of the 1990s, the left in the Philippines was indeed at an ebb. Not anymore. The Philippine left has revived. In 2001, activists of Bayan, Akbayan, PM, Sanlakas and other left-wing organizations were among those in the forefront of the huge rallies and mass actions that culminated in People Power II and the ouster of “boss”-president Estrada. In recent years, CPP-NPA guerrilla actions have picked up again, although they seem not to have yet reached the peak levels of the 1980s. The U.S. and other Western states as well as of the Arroyo government have tried to isolate the CPP-NPA internationally by labeling it a “terrorist” organization. They have also tried to cut off its funding sources by freezing its bank assets. These “counter-terrorist” measures have proven largely ineffective. The Philippine government, despite tagging the CPP-NPA as “terrorist,” has been forced to resume peace negotiations with its “united front” arm, the NDF. The holding of the talks in Oslo, Norway, with the Norwegian government playing a virtual mediating role constitutes a major diplomatic gain for the NDF. In the 2001 and 2004 elections, the CPP-NPA, asserting its *de facto* control of guerrilla zones, intensified its collection of “permit-to campaign” (PTC) fees from candidates wishing to campaign in these zones. The government could not do much to prevent the CPP-NPA from extorting millions of pesos through PTC. Meanwhile, the ND electoral party Bayan Muna topped the 2001 and 2004 party-list ballot, both times getting the maximum three congressional seats allowed in the party-list system. Two other ND groups, Anakpawis and Gabriela, also won party-list seats in 2004. Other left groups have made it to the winning column in the party-list vote too in 1998, 2001 and/or 2004: Akbayan, PM, Sanlakas, AMIN, ABA-

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candidates in the 1998 and 2001 party-list elections but did not make it to the winning column.

<sup>26</sup> Hewison and Rodan 1996, pp. 42-43, 58-62, 66; Rodan 1996b, p. 1. Hewison and Rodan use Michael Bernhard’s definition of *civil society*: an autonomous sphere “from which political forces representing constellations of interests in society have contested state power.”

<sup>27</sup> Huntington 1991, pp. 97-8; Adriano 2003a, p. 4; Landé 2001, p. 101.

AKO and Abanse Pinay. Apart from their party-list victories, Akbayan, Bayan Muna and Sanlakas have won some government posts at the barangay (village), municipal, city and provincial levels. PDSP has garnered a congressional seat through the district system. In the pursuit of the “people’s agenda,” left parties and groups as well as POs and NGOs identified with different strands of the left have kept up the pressure on the government through the “parliament of the streets.”

A major factor in the resilience of the Philippine left is that capitalism in the Philippines has not been as successful as in the other modern countries of Southeast Asia. Over the past few decades, in fact, the Philippines has lagged behind its neighbors in economic growth, i.e., in gross national product (GNP) or gross domestic product (GDP) growth. Moreover, most Filipinos have not enjoyed the economic benefits of capitalist development. Philippine left parties and groups have put a good part of the blame for the country’s ills to global capitalism, more specifically, to neoliberal globalization, and they have had some success in putting their message across to ordinary Filipinos. They have linked a host of problems – low wages, unemployment, lack of job security, high prices of goods, displacements of peasants and urban poor, environmental damage, etc. – to the policies of liberalization, deregulation and privatization adopted by the government as prescribed by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organization. The left groups have called for the assertion of national sovereignty and thus helped prevent the harnessing of nationalist ideology to capitalist development.

Another factor is the more sophisticated character of the CPP/NDs, long a powerful force in the Philippine left. From the 1950s until the 1970s, Maoism was a major force in the left in Southeast Asia. At one time or another within this period, in fact, communist parties that adhered to Maoism or were strongly influenced by it became a major or even dominant force in the left in Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaya/Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Adhering to Mao’s doctrine of “encircling the cities from the countryside,” the communist parties in Burma, Malaya, North Kalimantan (in Borneo) and Thailand built guerrilla zones and waged guerrilla warfare in the countryside and maintained only a skeletal support network in the cities. They remained largely rural insurgencies and were eventually crushed or terribly debilitated by massive government counter-insurgency campaigns.<sup>28</sup> A major factor for the implosion of the Communist Party of Thailand, aside from its ill-

considered attacks on the monarchy and the Sino-Vietnamese split, was the CPT leadership's refusal to modify strategy by adopting the more mixed urban/rural approach successfully used by the Vietnamese.<sup>29</sup> In multi-ethnic Malaya and Burma, the pro-Beijing communist parties were further hamstrung by their inability to expand beyond a single ethnic community.<sup>30</sup> The *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI or Indonesian Communist Party) followed Mao's party and "united front" principles, but, in contrast to their Burmese, Malay and Thai counterparts, engaged in a purely parliamentary struggle. When the Suharto regime resorted to extreme repression, the PKI cadres and activists had no rural guerrilla areas to escape to and were massacred and wiped out. The CPP has not restricted itself to waging a rural insurgency nor to engaging in a purely parliamentary struggle. The party has constantly avowed the primacy of armed struggle over legal, political struggle and of the rural arena over the urban arena. In actual practice, however, the political struggle and the urban arena have often taken equal or higher priority. Apart from waging armed struggle in the countryside, the NDs have engaged in open, legal mass movements mainly in major urban centers, and ventured into open coalitions as well as revolutionary alliances; women's, indigenous peoples' and environmental issues; liberation theology; urban guerrilla warfare; international work (including "diplomatic struggle" and organizing overseas Filipinos); peace negotiations; and since 1986, electoral struggle and work in government.

Revulsion against elite and *trapo* politics is another factor in the left's revival. In 1987, the slogan of "new politics" (as opposed to *trapo* politics) did not really catch on. Since then, the call for "new politics" seems to have brought some support for the left not just in mass campaigns and mobilizations but also, to an appreciable extent, in the electoral sphere.

In such a slow-industrializing and socially inequalitarian country as the Philippines, the middle class has remained small. The assertion that the middle class has assumed the leading role in the struggle for democratization in the Philippines (see p. 69) is highly disputable. The middle class did have a sizeable and very visible presence in People Power I and may have even comprised the majority at EDSA in People Power II. But the greater part of those at People Power I and in the mass protests all over the country leading up to both People Power I and II came from the lower classes.<sup>31</sup> In both events, it was not the

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<sup>28</sup> Hobday 1986, section 2, chap. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Marks 1991, pp. 374-5.

<sup>30</sup> Hobday 1986, pp. 230, 256.

<sup>31</sup> With regards EDSA II, see Bautista 2001, pp. 7-9.

middle class, but the elite, that exercised effective leadership. This was clearly borne out by the results: the establishment (in EDSA I) and perpetuation (in EDSA II) of an elite-dominated democracy. The leading figures in both events, Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, were not from the middle class. They were members of the elite – of powerful political families, in fact. One of the reasons why democracy in the Philippines has remained largely formal and truncated and not deepened into a more participatory and egalitarian one is that the middle class has posed no challenge whatsoever to the rule of the oligarchic and patrimonial elite.

While NGOs with personnel coming mainly from the middle class have indeed mushroomed, independent organizations of the working masses – POs – have likewise proliferated and through them, the masses have directly fought for their rights and welfare. Hewison and Rodan themselves admit that a vigorous independent labor movement continues to exist in the Philippines.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, many leaders and members of POs and NGOs, including organizations of mainly middle class professionals, maintain close links with left parties and groups and look up to them for political direction or leadership. Unlike in Thailand where many former CPT and leftist cadres turned their energies to NGOs and shunned further involvement in radical politics,<sup>33</sup> leftists in the PO/NGO network in the Philippines have remained active in, or supportive of, left parties.

### ***Democratic and Undemocratic Features***

Leftist leaders in the Philippines have argued that the democracy in the country is not a genuine one. It is, at best, a “bourgeois democracy” still very much under the thumb of U.S. imperialism. (“Bourgeois democracy” is basically the same as “elite democracy.”) Both the PKP and the CPP have asserted that genuine democracy cannot be achieved for as long as the country remains under neocolonial rule and continues to have grave disparities in the distribution of its wealth and resources between the elite few and the toiling masses. Armed revolution, leaders of these parties have argued, is the only means to defeat the imperialists, landlords and *compradors*, and bring about economic and political democracy.

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<sup>32</sup> Hewison and Rodan 1996, p. 61.

<sup>33</sup> Ungpakorn 2003, chapter 10; Chutima 1994, pp. 146-7; Maisrikrod 1997, p. 155.



In place of “bourgeois” democracy, the PKP envisaged a “socialist” or “proletarian democracy” similar to that in the Soviet bloc countries. The CPP, on the other hand, envisaged a “people’s democracy” – the “People’s Democratic Republic of the Philippines” – like Mao’s “People’s Republic of China” and Kim Il Sung’s “Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.” The existing “joint reactionary dictatorship” of the exploiting classes would be replaced with a “united front dictatorship” (patterned after Mao’s “people’s democratic dictatorship”) – “a joint dictatorship of all revolutionary classes and strata under the leadership of the proletariat.”<sup>34</sup> Both the PKP and the CPP saw themselves as the leading detachment of the working masses and believed that this vanguard role would continue after revolutionary victory. The “socialist” and “people’s democracies” of the Soviet Union, China and other communist states have, of course, now been discredited as being nothing more than one-party dictatorships. In 1989-92, the “socialist democracies” of Eastern Europe fell one after another in quick succession, as the masses rose up against their “vanguards.”

When the PKP was founded in 1930, it was not actually engaged in armed struggle against the state. It can be said that the Philippine communist movement could have evolved differently, i.e., taken the parliamentary road, eschewed armed struggle and accepted political pluralism, as the “Eurocommunists” did. But then it could very well be argued that repression by state forces and by the private armies and goons of powerful political families left the communist forces with no other choice but to take up arms. Such repression reached extreme levels during periods of authoritarian rule – the Japanese occupation and the Marcos dictatorship. Even during the periods of “colonial” or postcolonial democracy, the communists and their supporters suffered repression and unwarranted exclusion from the democratic process: the banning of the PKP and the incarceration of its leaders in 1931; the harassment of Huks in 1945 and the non-proclamation of winning DA candidates in 1946; and, at a time when the PKP had already given up the armed struggle, the enactment of the Anti-Subversion Law in 1957, outlawing PKP and similar organizations.

As the agents for the setting up of one-party dictatorship, the PKP and the CPP could be dismissed as having been nothing more than undemocratic forces and threats to democracy (or the restoration of democracy). Such an assessment, however, needs to be qualified. The struggles the PKP and the CPP waged towards the attainment of power exhibited an intriguing combination of democratic and undemocratic elements and that the two parties actually played

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<sup>34</sup> Guerrero 1979a, p. 162.

both positive and negative roles vis-à-vis the democratization process in the Philippines.

The contribution of the PKP and the CPP, together with their supporters and allies, in furthering democracy and democratization is far from inconsequential. In 1946-86, the PKP and the CPP, together with their supporters and allies, were steadfastly and consistently struggling against economic and political domination by the country's oligarchic elite and espousing a more egalitarian society. They promoted popular participation and empowerment, organizing and mobilizing the masses, especially at the grassroots level, for various economic, political and social endeavors – from local self-help projects all the way to nationwide mass protest actions. In the dark years of Marcos' martial law, the NDs built "open, legal mass organizations", "legal programs" and "legal institutions" despite the dictatorship's moves to restrict the right to free association and to muzzle dissent. After the Aquino assassination, the NDs, together with the SDs and other left groups, built a myriad of "cause-oriented groups" and coalitions that served as the backbone of the mass movement in the waning years of the dictatorship. The "legal mass organizations," "legal programs" and "cause-oriented groups" were among the precursors of what are now known as POs and NGOs, which have proliferated all over the country and are involved in a wide range of concerns – development work, sectoral issues, health, human rights, environment, etc. Although many of today's POs and NGOs are not aligned with the left, a good part of the credit for their flourishing belongs to the left.

The NDs played a crucial role in the restoration of democracy in 1986. In their efforts to topple the Marcos dictatorship and replace it with a CPP-dominated "united front dictatorship," the NDs waged guerrilla warfare, organized countless mass protest actions all over the country and were indeed at the forefront of the anti-dictatorship struggle. Such fierce resistance weakened the dictatorship and greatly helped erode its domestic and international support. The NDs' political and military struggles helped set the stage for the Marcos regime's eventual ouster through "people power." The country's oligarchic elite and Washington had no choice but to agree to a return to democratic rule. Wurfel observes: "The [communist] insurgency in a curious way contributed to a peaceful democratic transition. It catalyzed unity in the opposition elite and motivated American support for liberalization because Marcos seemed to be

feeding the fires of revolution, not controlling them.”<sup>35</sup> Anderson credits the revolutionary left with being “the first and foremost factor” in the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship. “The rapid growth of the CPP-NPA,” he explained, “so alarmed the United States that it finally turned against Marcos and eventually hauled him into golden imprisonment in Hawaii.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, in an ironic twist, the NDs’ bid to set up a one-party dictatorship ultimately and significantly contributed to an unintended outcome: the restoration of democracy, albeit a deficient one.

Outweighing the democratic or democratizing features of the PKP and the CPP, however, are their undemocratic features. Besides the undemocratic character of their alternative to the current Philippine state and society, the PKP and the CPP have been undemocratic in their internal workings, and in their relations with POs and NGOs and with other political forces. Structures within each of these two communist parties have tended to be top-down, hierarchical, even patriarchal. Party leaders have made important decisions without the benefit of free and thorough discussion and debate involving the entire party organization. Party-aligned POs and NGOs, especially those established upon the initiative of the party, have tended to lack or to lose organizational integrity. The CPP strategy has been said to be “totalizing” in the sense that “it viewed all other significant struggles, such as those for women’s rights, minority rights, and environmental well-being, as aspects of the broader struggle against fascism and imperialism, which was ‘central’ and thus claimed strategic priority”.<sup>37</sup> When the CPP-aligned NDs became the single biggest force in the anti-dictatorship movement in the early and mid-1980s, they tried to impose their views on other progressive parties and groups, particularly the much smaller formations, and developed “vanguardist” airs and illusions. In their grim determination to seize power and win total victory, the PKP and the CPP at times resorted to maneuver and manipulation or even to intimidation and terror in relating not only with their enemies and tactical allies but with their mass base and supporters as well. Such undemocratic practices were partly conditioned or reinforced by the conspiratorial style of work of a revolutionary party forced to go underground and by the military style of a guerrilla army.

One sees in these undemocratic practices the portents of things to come if and when orthodox communists do get to power. The communist party, failing to

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<sup>35</sup> Wurfel 1988, p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> Anderson 1998b, p. 277.

<sup>37</sup> Bello 1993, p. 13.

acquire the democratic habit in its internal workings when still out of power, experiences great difficulty imbibing it in the course of running the country. As the experiences of socialist states ruled by Stalinist parties have shown, the communist party, soon after achieving victory, enshrines its “vanguard role” in the country’s constitution and relegates all other parties, if allowed to exist at all, to permanent subordinate status. Democratic features (e.g., active political involvement of popular organizations) do not simply vanish. In fact, soon after revolutionary victory, the communist party can very well promulgate radical changes for popular participation at the grassroots level. Over the years, however, as the party wins election after election and entrenches itself in power, the undemocratic features overwhelm and virtually obliterate the democratic elements. Once vibrant popular organizations become mere appendages and mouthpieces of the party and the state. In China, as pointed out by Georg Sorensen, the communist government pushed structural reforms and systems of local participation and succeeded in bringing about democratic changes at the micro level in its early years. As time passed, however, the state’s centralizing tendencies negated them and authoritarianism increasingly became the order of the day.<sup>38</sup>

In the case of the CPP, probably the most damning proof of its undemocratic ways are its gross violations of international humanitarian law, especially the horrendous waves of extra-judicial executions of suspected “deep-penetration agents” (DPAs) in 1982, 1985-86 and 1988-89, for which the party has not fully and satisfactorily accounted.<sup>39</sup> Despite strong criticism from international human rights groups, the CPP has persisted in such practices as summary executions and kangaroo “people’s courts.” In January 2003, in an attempt to justify its assassination of “rejectionist” leader and former NPA chief, Romulo Kintanar, the CPP blamed him for kidnappings-for-ransom, armed bank robberies and hold-ups, thereby inadvertently admitting that the CPP-NPA had been involved in these criminal activities.<sup>40</sup> The Plaza Miranda bombing of 1971, as growing evidence shows, may well be included in the CPP’s record of heinous acts.<sup>41</sup> Not yet in power, the CPP already has its hidden crimes, official truths and official lies. What can one expect of it when it reaches the pinnacles of power?

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<sup>38</sup> Sorensen 1993, pp. 22-23.

<sup>39</sup> See Arguelles 1995, pp. 105-123; Abinales 1996b, pp. 154-179; Garcia 2001; Sarmiento 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Quimpo 2003, p. 1

<sup>41</sup> See Jones 1989, chap. 5; Corpus 1989, chap. 1; and Salonga 2001, chap. 12.

## *An Instrumental View of Democracy*

Kenneth Roberts notes that in Latin American countries, the left's view of democracy changed in the course of the countries' shift from dictatorship to democracy in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Prior to that time, he says, two responses to formal democratic institutions and procedures predominated in the Latin American left. The first was boycott on the grounds that electoral democracy was a tool and a façade for bourgeois class rule. The second was participation in these institutions but only as a means to "accumulate forces" for an eventual revolutionary confrontation. Latin American leftists did not regard electoral democracy as integral to the revolutionary project.<sup>42</sup> With the end of military or authoritarian regimes beginning in the late 1970s, many left groups shifted from armed to parliamentary struggle and became integrated into the new electoral democracies. In a good number of Latin American countries, the left re-entered the political center stage no longer via the bullet but via the ballot. Left parties became the main opposition parties in Brazil, Uruguay, El Salvador, apart from Nicaragua (the Sandinistas, who lost power in 1990); junior partners in centrist governments, as in Chile and Venezuela; and major forces in Mexico and the Dominican Republic. Despite the many flaws and limitations of the new regimes, the left gradually learned to recognize and accept the intrinsic value of formal democratic institutions. The left learned to care about formal democracy, because, to borrow from Huber et al., it tended to be more than merely formal – it made free and open debate over competing projects for society, as well as deepening to more participatory and egalitarian democracy, possible.<sup>43</sup> Democracy became a central element of the socialist project, as essential as its anti-capitalist economic and social components. Thus, the outright rejection and instrumental view of democracy were replaced by an integral conception of democracy.<sup>44</sup> Latin American left parties started to democratize their own internal processes and their relations with organizations in civil society, abandoning the verticalism characteristic of vanguardist politics. Brazil's *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT) or Workers' Party, for instance, institutionalized mechanisms of rank-and-file participation and established a characteristic "bottom up" style.<sup>45</sup> The left parties also began to appreciate the importance of the autonomy of popular organizations and the social movements. The rejection

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<sup>42</sup> Roberts 1998, pp. 18-19.

<sup>43</sup> Huber, Rueschemeyer and Stephens 1997, p. 323.

<sup>44</sup> Roberts 1998, p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> Alves 1993, p. 235.

of a monolithic model paved the way for broader intra-left unity – the convergence of a larger number of parties and ideological currents.<sup>46</sup>

Unlike its counterparts in Latin America, the Philippine left continues to grapple with the question of how to regard formal democratic institutions and processes. The CPP still seeks to overthrow the “reactionary” Philippine state through armed means even though its warfare has been stuck at the guerrilla level for over thirty years without signs of ever graduating to the regular warfare it has aimed to reach. And notwithstanding the fall of the one-party dictatorships in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in 1989-92, the CPP still dreams of setting up the “people’s democracy” variant in the Philippines with itself as the vanguard.

The CPP continues to view Philippines’ current democratic order as “bourgeois” and attaches no intrinsic value to its formal democratic institutions and procedures. Thus, the parameters of the debate within the CPP regarding these institutions have remained similar to those of the pre-1980 Latin American left debate: outright rejection or instrumental use. In the wake of the boycott fiasco of 1986, the NDs established PnB, which fielded candidates in the 1987 elections. The CPP, however, regarded the electoral struggle as inferior and subordinate to the armed struggle. After PnB’s crushing defeat in its electoral debut, the NDs lost interest in PnB and it faded away. Only after other left groups made modest victories in the 1998 Party-List vote did the NDs re-enter the electoral arena – but still within the old parameters. In the internal debate regarding the May 2001 elections, the hardline Maoists stood for rejecting any meaningful participation, while those somewhat more flexible, viewing the electoral struggle as a useful tactic for the eventual armed seizure of state power, advocated for setting up Bayan Muna and fielding candidates in the Party-List and local elections. During the electoral campaign itself, the NPA harassed the rivals of Bayan Muna, especially other left parties, even barring them from entering and campaigning in areas where NPA guerrillas operated. Showing just how cynical it was of the entire electoral process, the CPP-NPA, as in previous elections, extorted large sums from candidates of different parties for “permits to campaign” in guerrilla zones. In the May 2004 elections, the NDs fielded six party-list groups, but only three made it to the winning column (Bayan Muna, Anak Pawis and Gabriela), doubling the NDs’ seats in Congress from three to six.<sup>47</sup> As before, the NPA collected PTC fees and harassed other left groups.

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<sup>46</sup> Ellner 1993, pp. 11, 16.

<sup>47</sup> The other ND party-list groups are Anak ng Bayan, Suara Bangsamoro and Migrante.

The CPP's instrumental view of democracy is not limited merely to elections and the legislature. It holds for the question of human rights as well. The CPP's former secretary-general, who views human rights as "bourgeois-liberal" rights, declared: "The struggle for 'human rights' is a legitimate and necessary part of the overall national democratic struggle. In my opinion, however, it should be confined to the sphere of tactical struggle or the struggle for reforms, used as only one of the means or forms of organization in working or forging alliances with those in the upper sections of the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie and with their bourgeois-reformist organizations; in working within the state bureaucracy and the military, and other reactionary institutions like the Church, in order to divide the reactionary classes; and in drawing sympathy and support for our struggle from bourgeois-liberal political forces and institutions of other countries. It is also an important instrument in principled political negotiations of revolutionary and progressive forces with the reactionary government or any part of this. Also in dealing with important international organizations dominated by imperialism and reaction like the United Nations."<sup>48</sup> Even those in the CPP who claim to accept the universality of human rights assert that the only genuine human rights movement is one that pursues the ND line.<sup>49</sup> For the NDs, human rights have become a political tool, a weapon to be appropriated for the ND movement. From the Marcos authoritarian period to the post-Marcos "elite democracy" era, NDs have time and again denounced the Philippine state for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in order to "expose and oppose" its "reactionary" character. Yet the CPP has rarely acknowledged responsibility for its own violations, often putting the blame on "left opportunists," "gangsters," "putschists" and other miscreants who had purportedly managed to worm themselves into the party.<sup>50</sup>

In the course of peace negotiations, the NDF signed the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) with the Philippine government, but neither side has really conducted serious investigations into human rights violations of which it is accused of perpetrating. On the part of the NDF, it would seem that the agreement and, for that matter, the entire process of peace talks are more for scoring points in its "diplomatic struggle." According to a former NDF cadre in

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<sup>48</sup> Baylosis 1994, p. 6. (*Translated from Filipino.*)

<sup>49</sup> See Sison 1995.

<sup>50</sup> Casiple 1996, pp. 16-17.

Europe, the NDF wants to use the talks as a means to attain “belligerency status,” to expand and consolidate its forces, and to provide legitimacy to Sison’s continued stay as a political exile in the Netherlands.<sup>51</sup>

The instrumental view is reflected even further in the CPP’s approach towards POs and NGOs, towards social movements, indeed towards civil society as a whole. As mentioned earlier, the party took the lead in building and nurturing “legal mass organizations” and “legal institutions and programs” in the dark days of repression under Marcos. Party and ND elements provided much needed assistance or guidance in the formative period. Gradually, however, the party increased its influence or control over these organizations – through clandestine party or ND cells within or through a “political officer” from without (oftentimes a person from the underground). Many came to be regarded as “Party-led” or “Party-influenced organizations” (as they were referred to in internal party communications). Thus, from being instruments of popular empowerment, they were transformed into mere “transmission belts” of party policies and directives. In time, some organizations managed to break or drift away or from party control or “guidance.” A good number, however, were unable to cut off their umbilical cords and thus never achieved full organizational integrity.

The tension between those for and those against party “guidance” within many “Party-led” or “influenced” organizations persisted for long periods and sometimes resulted in open clashes. In the 1986 boycott, many legal mass organizations took a boycott stance only after party and ND elements within (and also from without), following “democratic centralism,” campaigned hard and sometimes even resorted to maneuvers and arm-twisting, to get the boycott position carried. Many mass organization members resisted. Nonetheless, almost all of the major open ND organizations and alliances went for boycott. A similar situation arose in the party’s campaign for a rejection of the new constitution in 1987. Another ruckus flared up in June 1989 when the ND trade union center, *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (KMU) or the May First Movement, issued a statement after the Tien An Men massacre without first consulting affiliate federations, virtually condoning the violence of the Chinese state against protesting students and workers. The statement, it turned out, had actually been formulated by the CPP’s National Trade Union Bureau. Four years later, in the midst of the ideological conflict within the CPP/ND ranks, three major federations disaffiliated from KMU, decrying “external dictation on KMU policy and programs” and the

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<sup>51</sup> Carlo Butalid, as cited in Pascual 2003, p. 5.



violation of “the integrity of trade union structures.”<sup>52</sup> In a study of the CPP and the peasant movement, James Putzel traced the roots of the party’s “instrumentalist approach” towards the peasantry to the very foundations of Marxist-Leninist theory and historical practice. It was in the traditional communist mould, he wrote, to treat all people’s struggles and organizations in an instrumental fashion, always subordinating these to the party and its goal of seizing state power.<sup>53</sup>

The CPP’s instrumentalist approach towards POs and NGOs, towards social movements and towards civil society flies in the face of the notion that the traditional left in the Philippines has been a strategic leader in the struggle for civil society. The party’s efforts in building POs and NGOs and promoting social movements, especially during the period of dictatorship when there were hardly any, may well have contributed to popular empowerment. But subsequent efforts at “managing” (to borrow from Putzel) POs, NGOs and social movements, had the reverse effect – popular disempowerment. The situation today in the NDs’ network of POs and NGOs has not changed much. CPP or ND cadres or “political officers” within or outside these organizations continue to “guide” the members to follow the Party’s “correct political line.”

Ever since its founding, the CPP has always maintained its leading role in the revolutionary struggle for the establishment and consolidation of the “people’s democratic state”.<sup>54</sup> After the fall of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, the CPP re-emphasized its vanguard role: “As a matter of principle and practice, the Party is the comprehensive leader and center of the Philippine revolution in both national democratic and socialist stages. It leads the armed struggle, the united front, mass movement, the organs of political power and eventually the People’s Democratic Republic of the Philippines.”<sup>55</sup> This implies that in the event of revolutionary victory, POs, NGOs and the social movements would all be made to toe the CPP’s line.

### ***An Emerging Democratic Left***

Dictatorships in many parts of the globe have fallen. Democratization has become an international buzzword. Among the authoritarian regimes that have

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<sup>52</sup> National Federation of Labor Unions (NAFLU), National Federation of Labor (NFL) and United Workers of the Philippines (UWP), “Joint Statement on Disaffiliation from KMU” (29 September 1993), unpublished manuscript.

<sup>53</sup> Putzel 1995b, pp. 645-6.

<sup>54</sup> Congress of Re-establishment, CPP 1968b, pp. 61-63; Guerrero 1979, pp. 162-66.

been toppled are the one-party dictatorships of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet bloc. China, which only a few decades ago stridently proclaimed that “Revolution is the main trend in the world today,” is now too busy building “market socialism” (read: capitalism). In the Philippines itself, authoritarian rule has long been over. The oligarchic elite still controls the country’s politics, but the political space in which forces working for popular empowerment can move and operate has expanded. The very necessity and wisdom of armed struggle, especially that of a protracted nature, have been put into question. Over thirty years of armed conflict – not just the communist insurgency but also the Moro rebellion – have exacted a terrible toll in human lives and economic and social costs, and have helped perpetuate and aggravate a culture of violence. Moreover, it is now widely perceived that faxes, e-mails and text-messaging, when used to mobilize “people power,” are more effective tools in felling undemocratic regimes and corrupt rulers than the barrel of a gun.

The Philippine left – or at least part of it – has been moving on too. Since the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, and especially since the CPP split, the general trend among the emergent political parties of the left has been to move away from armed or military struggle and to adopt a non-armed political strategy characterized by engagement in both the mass movement and electoral struggle. Some of the new left parties and groups have changed not only their strategies and tactics but also, in significant part, their goals. The long-term goal of socialism remains basically unchanged, although the emergent left groups find it difficult to explain in concrete terms how this would look like and how this would be achieved. The change in goals has more to do with attitudes toward democracy. In this regard, the development of the Philippine left parallels that of the Latin American left, though apparently some years behind and only to a certain extent.

For SD groups, socialism *and* democracy had always been their avowed strategic goals. In the late 1980s, however, SD groups like Pandayan and Kasapi were much more open and willing to open lines of communication with other left groups like the popdems and Bisig, conduct joint endeavors with them and engage them in discussion and debate. In the popdems’ publication, *Conjuncture*, Pandayan vice-chairman Benjamin T. Tolosa, Jr., explained that while democratic socialists viewed political democracy as “a genuine popular achievement,” they believed that the fullness of democracy could only be achieved through the establishment of socialism. “The socialist project,” he

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<sup>55</sup> Communist Party of the Philippines 1991, p. 52.

wrote, “is thus one of ‘democratization’: the extension and deepening of democracy from the political to the economic and socio-cultural realms. It aims at the ‘equalization of power’ in all spheres.” He outlined a strategy for democratic socialists based on a post-Marxist analysis of the state as still being dominated by a ruling elite but capable of being penetrated by initiatives of popular forces:

The strategy seeks to construct democracy and socialism ‘from below’: a democracy and socialism founded on a conscientized and organized citizenry based in strong, independent people’s organizations. The strategy calls for democratic socialist intervention at various points of struggle – both within and outside the formal structures of government. The objective is the consolidation of democratic socialist centers of power (including victories on the level of popular consciousness) towards the conquest and transformation of the state. A central goal is the establishment of a form of representative democracy which is dynamically linked with organs of direct democracy in the workplace and the community.<sup>56</sup>

It took a bit of time for significant sections within the ND ranks to come round to Pandayan’s position. Rejecting the post-Marcos state as a “fake” or “bourgeois” democracy, most NDs still regarded a “proletarian” or “people’s democracy” ruled by a vanguard party as the only true democracy. For as long they still held on to such a notion, they could not make the shift from an instrumental to an integral view of democracy. The issue of political pluralism proved pivotal. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the issue had already figured in internal debates in the CPP, particularly in relation to the NDF program. After EDSA I, the NDs discussed it more openly. When the NDs formed their first electoral party, PnB, they billed it as the party of “new politics.” In its platform, PnB carried the standard ND line of being for a nationalist and democratic government. Through the initiative of more forward-looking elements within, however, it also advocated for such non-standard fare as “popular democracy” and a “pluralistic political system.”<sup>57</sup> After its poor showing in the 1987 elections, PnB faded away. Within the ND movement, the popdems took up the cudgels for political pluralism. Together with Bisig, Pandayan, Kasapi and other left groups,

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<sup>56</sup> Tolosa 1990, pp. 8-9.

<sup>57</sup> *Partido ng Bayan* 1986, pp. 1-2.

the popdems held discussions on the problems and prospects of political pluralism in the Philippines.<sup>58</sup> In the early 1990s, the debate within the CPP on political pluralism heated up and it became one of the main points of divergence between “reaffirmists” and “rejectionists.” The “reaffirmists” considered pluralism – and correctly so – as a negation of the CPP’s permanent vanguard role. After upholding political pluralism and rejecting vanguardism, many “rejectionists” began to accept “pluralist democracy” and to move from an instrumental to an integral view of democracy.

Shortly after the CPP split, some “rejectionists,” together with other non-ND-tradition leftists and members of Philippine solidarity groups, held a conference in San Francisco, California, in April 1993, for the purpose of “reexamining and renewing the Philippine progressive vision.” The participants of the “Forum for Philippine Alternatives” (FOPA) resolved to carry on with “new politics,” but this time highlighting its pluralistic and popular democratic features and further developing the concept. No longer just anti-*trapo*, “new politics” took on features that departed from the not-too-democratic orthodox CPP approach. “New politics,” as redefined by the FOPA participants, saw its strength as emanating from the confluence of plural initiatives rather than from unity around one central strategy and program. It distrusted “totalizing ideologies” and resisted centralized direction. It regarded political struggle not as a process that would lead to a climactic seizure of state power but as a gradual process of transformation of the power relationships in society, i.e., the transformation of elite democracy to mass, popular democracy. Popular empowerment was viewed as a process of building up a “parallel power” in civil society that would ultimately alter the exercise of state power.”<sup>59</sup>

A movement built along “new politics” would contend in different political arenas, “but especially under a regime of elite democracy, in the electoral struggle, which is, whether we like it or not, the current source of legitimacy on who governs.” The movement would continue to engage in mass mobilizations or “the parliament of the streets,” and its strategy would also include a program of governmental reform – “transforming the formal structure of the state to make it less resistant to the attainment of the people’s interests.” The main elements of the vision and program of the movement would be democracy, equity and redistribution, growth, and national sovereignty. FOPA clarified that democracy would have to be released from its identification with

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<sup>58</sup> Coronel Ferrer 1989, pp. 5-6.

<sup>59</sup> Bello 1993, pp. 11, 17-18.

elite-dominated elections, and that equity and distribution would have to be divorced from the failed Soviet and Chinese models of socialism.<sup>60</sup>

To signify a complete break with the instrumental approach of the CPP towards POs/NGOs and towards civil society, the emergent left forces have taken an unequivocal stand on the integrity and autonomy of POs/NGOs vis-à-vis political parties, as well as the state. Taking off from Held's "principle of autonomy," the participants of the FOPA conference expressed a firm belief in "the capacity of the people to reason and deliberate, to be self-reflective, and to exercise self-determination."<sup>61</sup> In a PO-NGO conference in March 1994, leading "rejectionists" emphasized that POs/NGOs were not mere "transmission belts" of the party or the state but entities that had a life of their own. Deriding the CPP penchant for setting up, then just dissolving POs/NGOs at will, the participants asserted that POs/NGOs were not mere tactical formations serving the party's political agenda but strategic formations that would keep on working for popular empowerment even after socialist victory.<sup>62</sup>

In 1997, Reyes, a former CPP Politburo member, expounded on a model for the relationship of the political movements with POs/NGOs:

We stand for the autonomous development of social movements and civil society vis-à-vis the political movements. We respect the integrity and independent dynamism of the NGOs, trade unions, mass organizations and other formations of civil society. Vanguardist attitudes toward these organizations and employing organizational control over them must be shunned from our practice. Instead, we engage them in a dialogue of praxis. Socialists joining these organizations must respect their integrity and must behave as such.

On the other hand, socialists must exercise the right to criticize regressive tendencies in the NGO-PO community, particularly the rise of bureaucratism and privilege, and campaign to further democratize organizations of civil society.<sup>63</sup>

By and large, the emergent left parties appear to be doing fairly well in putting into practice their avowed aim to respect the integrity and autonomy of

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<sup>60</sup> Bello 1993, pp. 21-22.

<sup>61</sup> Gershman 1993, p. 170.

<sup>62</sup> PO-NGO Conference 1994, pp. 5, 20, 35.

<sup>63</sup> Reyes 1998, p. 106.

the POs/NGOs. They have done away with the ND practices of “political officers” giving “guidance” to POs/NGOs and of party or “UG” (underground) cells holding secret meetings ahead of PO/NGO meetings to formulate “proposals” on the latter’s course of action. For the ex-ND parties and groups that are still “UG” (underground) or have UG components, observing the autonomy of POs/NGOs and of open electoral parties aligned with them has proven to be quite a challenge. At times, their cadres and activists, accustomed to the tight, highly centralized and hierarchical organizational system in CPP-NPA days, fall into old habits. Being an open political party, Akbayan does not encounter the problem of the relations between UG and open formations. The multi-tendency party, however, has encountered certain intra-party problems perceived at least by some as having to do with the relations between the “political blocs” (tendencies) and between members and non-members of the blocs. In the January 2001 congress, several leading personages and their allies withdrew from the party, claiming bloc manipulation in the election of party-list candidates, a charge the party leadership has denied.

Since the CPP split and the FOPA conference, however, an important question regarding democracy appears to be not quite resolved. Recognizing the intrinsic value of democratic institutions and processes, Akbayan and the new groups from the SD tradition have taken an integral view of democracy. The “rejectionist” Marxist-Leninist parties (PMP, RPM-P, RPM-M and MLPP), however, appear not to have shifted fully to such a view. While rejecting the CPP’s “protracted people’s war,” the ex-ND parties still entertain the possibility of Jacobin-style seizure of state power.<sup>64</sup> A fine line actually distinguishes the positions of the two flanks of the emergent left, and this has to do with the question of popular insurrection. In the light of EDSA I, II and III, none of the new left parties and groups have ruled out popular insurrection or uprising as a possible recourse of the mass movement. The ex-NDs see popular insurrection as the possible culmination of the revolutionary struggle for seizing power – what Laclau and Mouffe refer to as the “foundational moment of rupture.” Akbayan and the SD-tradition groups, however, see it as but a part of a protracted process of social and political change. In 1997, Padayon leader Ricardo Reyes, now Akbayan chairman, wrote: “To prepare for ‘the moment’ remains a socialist

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<sup>64</sup> Ben Reid (2004, p. 31) describes the divergence in this way: “[T]here is a consensus [among SDs and Bisig] that the democratic struggle remains primarily defending and consolidating the gains of the EDSA revolution against the Marcos dictatorship in 1986. This contrasts with the revolutionary left [e.g., PMP], which while defending the opening

responsibility. It still is an essential ingredient of the socialist elan. This 'moment' however need not always be the 'grand moment' of cataclysmic revolutions of the past. It may be 'moments,' junctures where radical changes can also be realized if revolutionary socialists live up to the challenge."<sup>65</sup> Criticizing left groups that continued to define their revolutionary objective in terms of "smashing the existing state machine," Nemenzo stated: "This all or nothing attitude is a debilitating form of dogmatism."<sup>66</sup> The new left groups are still in a flux. Some of the ex-ND groups may yet turn fully to an integral view of democracy as they go deeper into the state arena (elections and governance).

### ***"Democracy from Below" and the Emergent Left***

In the Philippines' contested democracy, the left has always identified itself with, and built its base among, the peasants, workers and other marginalized groups and communities struggling against elite rule. The single biggest bloc of the left, however, cannot really be considered as truly representing "democracy from below." The CPP and the CPP-aligned ND movement have proven to be anti-democratic in their behavior and practice in Philippine polity and in their internal workings. Moreover, what they proffer as an alternative to "elite democracy" – "national democracy" or "people's democracy" – redounds to nothing more than a one-party dictatorship. The left in the Philippines has gotten an undemocratic or anti-democratic taint largely because of the CPP's and the NDs' undemocratic ways. The CPP and the ND movement, however, no longer hold a hegemonic position in the left. Long before the CPP split, other forces of the left had already emerged or revived, and expanded. Since the split, the left has become even more "plural," as more positive-looking leftists put it. Emergent left parties and groups like Akbayan, PMP, ABA-AKO and RPM-M show promise of becoming viable left projects as well as true representatives of "democracy from below."<sup>67</sup> Some of the new formations, particularly Akbayan and PMP, have been growing rapidly, building chapters all over the country.

The emergent left forces have continued the left tradition of forging close links with the poor and marginalized. Unlike the traditional parties of the elite,

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created by EDSA still seeks the replacement of the existing state with revolutionary organs of popular power."

<sup>65</sup> Reyes 1998, p. 98.

<sup>66</sup> Nemenzo 1996a, p. 54.

<sup>67</sup> By "emergent" or "new" left parties and groups, I exclude the CPP and the PDSP, which are the more established left parties, as well as ND and SD parties and groups identified with the CPP and the PDSP.

which have nebulous party organizations, the new left parties and groups have been striving to build party chapters and a politico-electoral base at the grassroots level. In contrast to the elite character of the traditional parties, the new left parties seek to have a truly “mass” character. Apart from promoting the popular movements engaged in “pressure” or contentious politics, the new left groups and allied POs/NGOs have also become much more involved in more “constructive” and not-too-contentious politics – development work. Unlike the CPP, the new left parties and groups are for untrammelled and non-instrumentalizing popular empowerment, recognizing and respecting the integrity and autonomy of POs, NGOs and the social movements. Like the post-authoritarian Latin American left, the new Philippine left has come to appreciate the positive aspects of the country’s democracy, despite all its deficiencies and fragility, and the opportunities it has opened for the deepening of democracy. The emergent left parties are learning to recognize the intrinsic value of formal democratic institutions and procedures, and have adopted or are moving towards an integral view of democracy. Precisely because of their growing appreciation of democratic processes and institutions, the new left forces have expanded beyond their involvement with POs, NGOs and social movements, a sphere where the left as a whole has already proven its mettle and clout, and ventured into the state arena – elections and governance – long the turf of the oligarchic elite and one of the left’s weakest spots. There is, however, also a much more straightforward reason: Explosions of “people power” and a strong and vibrant civil society are fine, but they are far from enough for as long as oligarchs and *trapos* still call the shots. “Autonomous popular strength,” declares Akbayan founding and current president Ronaldo Llamas, “has to be translated into political strength capable of determining state policies and programs that bring about social change.”<sup>68</sup>

Most of the new left parties burst into the public scene during the first party-list elections in 1998. ABA, AKO, Abanse Pinay, Akbayan and Sanlakas all espoused “new politics,” presenting it as the antithesis of *trapo* politics, and this helped them in winning congressional seats in their first election bids. The emergent left hammered on the theme of new politics versus *trapo* politics. In April 2000, the representatives of Akbayan and Sanlakas in the Lower House captured the headlines when they courageously exposed large-scale corruption in government – a *payola* scandal that involved their very colleagues in Congress.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Llamas 1996, p. 69.

<sup>69</sup> Sanlakas representative Renato Magtubo and Akbayan representative Loretta Ann Rosales exposed payoffs to legislators for the passage of the Omnibus Power Bill in the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress.



The anti-*trapo* movement surged when President Estrada himself was implicated in a multimillion-peso illegal gambling racket. All the left parties and groups mobilized their forces for the ouster of Estrada, who, as the impeachment proceedings soon showed, was the near quintessence of *trapo* politics. When Estrada, utilizing various legal maneuvers and mobilizing his *trapo* allies in the Senate, seemingly managed to bring the corruption investigation against him to a dead-end, hundreds of thousands of people poured out into the streets in indignation and forced him to flee Malacañang Palace. Unlike in People Power I, when the left was largely left out, this time, in People Power II, the left was among those right in the forefront.

Since EDSA II, virtually every group working for political and electoral reform has talked about “new politics.” When the NDs re-entered the electoral arena in 2001, they re-adopted the term. President Arroyo, who herself rose to power through patronage politics and now heads a *trapo*-dominated ruling coalition, hitched on to the bandwagon, promising “new politics” to the sea of people at EDSA during her inauguration in January 2001. This constituted a moral victory for the emergent left. But this also meant that the new left parties would have to go beyond “exposing and opposing” *trapo* politics and to get into the nitty-gritty of putting “new politics” into practice in their engagement in both civil society and the state.

Due to continuing ideological and political differences among the new left parties and sometimes even personal differences among their leaders, the emergent left has remained divided and has not witnessed a grand merger or coalition. The bickering and splintering that beset the “rejectionist” ranks, and to a lesser extent, the SD ranks through most of the 1990s have greatly subsided. The trend now, in fact, seems to be toward unity. The most significant unions have been the formal coalition of four political blocs (Bisig, Pandayan, the popdems and Siglaya) into Akbayan in 1998; the merger of PMP, PPD and SPP into a bigger PMP in 2002;<sup>70</sup> and the ABA-AKO merger in 2003. The new left parties and allied POs/NGOs have also formed tactical alliances on a variety of issues and concerns, which will be discussed in forthcoming chapters.

Ever since the CPP split, the emergent left parties and groups have had to endure harassment from the NPA, especially during election campaign periods. A most troubling development in recent years, however, has been the NPA executions of leading “rejectionists,” whom the CPP-NPA regards as “renegades” and “counter-revolutionaries,” as well as members of the new left parties. The

CPP-NPA acknowledged assassinating former NPA chief Kintanar in January 2003 and RPM-P founding chairman Arturo Tabara in September 2004, and is one of the prime suspects in the killing of PMP founding chairman Filemon Lagman in February 2001. The NPA has also been hitting at other left targets. From August 1999 to August 2002, the NPA conducted 19 armed operations against members of the MLPP in Central Luzon, killing 12 and wounding 15. (In the 2002 encounters, some NPA guerrillas were also killed as the MLPP fought back.) The NPA also killed two RPM-M cadres in Central Mindanao in 2001. Unarmed left groups have also been targeted. In 2003, the NPA executed a peasant leader in the Bondoc peninsula (Quezon province) and a barangay captain in Agusan del Norte, both local leaders of Akbayan. Apart from all the killings, the CPP-NPA has resorted to threats and other forms of intimidation.<sup>71</sup> The new left parties and groups have publicly denounced the CPP-NPA's killings and intimidation, but these have continued.

All the new left parties that I have listed on pp. 62-66 are convinced of the necessity of political engagement in both civil society (or the mass movement) and the state arena. The parties listed vary greatly in the levels of their engagement in the two spheres. Still concentrating on building its mass base, the MLPP still has not made an entry into the electoral arena. The electoral parties aligned with RPM-P have not yet been successful in winning a party-list seat. The RPM-M-aligned AMIN has twice made it to the party-list winning column, but the political work of both RPM-M and AMIN still remains largely confined to Mindanao. ABA-AKO and Abanse Pinay have restricted their electoral engagement only to the party-list vote. Akbayan and PMP are the new left parties whose engagement in both civil society and the state arena appears to be more extensive than that of the others.<sup>72</sup> Hence, in the forthcoming chapters, I will go into more detail in discussing the political work of Akbayan and PMP and the POs/NGOs and the political blocs and groups aligned with them.

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<sup>70</sup> See fn. 15.

<sup>71</sup> Rousset 2003, pp. 7-9.

<sup>72</sup> PMP's engagement in the state arena is mainly through the two party-list groups aligned with it, PM and Sanlakas.

## ***Chapter III***

# **The Emergent Left's Engagement in Civil Society**

After the EDSA uprising of 1986, there was a much greater recognition within the Philippine left of the importance of the “political struggle” – i.e., the mass movement (including “people power”-type uprisings) and the electoral struggle. Within the ND ranks, some viewed the political struggle as being as fundamental and decisive as armed or military struggle. Others, however, began to regard open, legal political struggle as the main form of struggle, or even questioned the necessity or judiciousness of continuing the armed struggle in the post-authoritarian era. Some emergent left groups started to be influenced by Gramsci’s concepts on hegemony, civil society and the “war of position.” After the CPP split, most of the “rejectionists” gradually moved away from armed struggle and concentrated on the mass movement and the electoral struggle. Nonetheless, they continued to adhere to the orthodox Marxist-Leninist position of eventually seizing state power through armed revolution. Meanwhile, the groups that had initially explored Gramsci’s ideas endeavored to develop these further.

While the emergent left groups were still grappling with the revised or new thinking on “mass movement” and “civil society,” the term “civil society” itself, vigorously promoted by donor agencies, the government, the churches, business, media and the PO/NGO community, shot to prominence in the Philippines, as elsewhere, and figured prominently in the literature on democracy and democratization. Soon, “civil society” became a buzzword even within the left too, including ND ranks. In the course of their engagement in civil society, the emergent left groups were exposed not just to different notions of civil society but also to different versions of the civil society argument vis-à-vis democracy and democratization.

According to Michael Foley and Bob Edwards, there are two broad versions of the “civil society argument.” “Civil Society I,” which harks back to Alexis de Tocqueville and is today forcefully put forward by scholars like Robert Putnam, stresses the importance of associational life and a strong and vigorous civil society in producing “social capital” and in promoting, maintaining and consolidating democracy. “Civil Society II,” which figures prominently in the literature on democratic transition in Eastern Europe and Latin America, views civil society as a sphere of social and political life that is independent of the state and that is capable of mobilizing opposition to a tyrannical regime.<sup>1</sup> I shall now refer to “Civil Society I” as *associational civil society* and “Civil Society II” as *counterweight civil society*. Since the fall of many authoritarian regimes during the “third wave” of democratization, associational civil society appears to have become the more influential version. In the Philippines, it has propagated a “harmony” model of politics, one that has tended to downplay the very real conflict between the country’s oligarchic elite and the poor and marginalized classes, sectors and communities.

Critics have raised all sorts of objections to associational and counterweight civil society, and put forward their own definitions, concepts or reconfigurations of civil society, which I shall later show. Unfortunately, however, they have not come up with an alternative civil society argument, particularly in relation to democracy and democratization.

The experiences of emergent left groups in the Philippines in their engagement in civil society seem to point to a plausible alternative. Although they were influenced to a certain extent by both associational and counterweight civil society, some of them have also developed an alternative civil society argument, one that appears to hew closely to the “radical democratic” perspective developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. The argument, which I shall now dub as *hegemonic civil society*, draws mainly from the Antonio Gramsci’s concept of civil society but rejects certain traditional Marxist views on the state and revolution. Hegemonic civil society views the consolidation and deepening of democracy not so much in terms of building a dense and vibrant civil society or developing it as a powerful counterpoise to the state, but more in terms of internal contestation – the struggle of subordinate classes and marginalized groups against the hegemonic elite *within* civil society.

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<sup>1</sup> Foley and Edwards 1996, p. 39; Edwards and Foley 2001, pp. 5-8. Putnam defines *social capital* as “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam 1995, p. 67; Putnam 2000, p. 19).

Philippine civil society, with “probably the highest NGO density in the world,”<sup>2</sup> has been a battleground of contending versions of the civil society argument. In their efforts in the sphere of civil society to transform the Philippines’ elite-dominated democracy into a more participatory and egalitarian one, the emergent left groups in the Philippines have had to wade through the Babel of civil society concepts and arguments. The development of their work in civil society has followed the twists and turns of their engagement with the contending versions of the civil society argument.

### ***From “Mass Organizations” and “Mass Movement” to “Civil Society”***

Before the 1990s, most of the left in the Philippines had never heard of “civil society.” The term appears often enough in the writings of Marx, Engels and Gramsci, but the CPP had always put more premium on the study of Mao’s works, not Marx and Engels, and considered Gramsci a “revisionist.” In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, left activists helped build “mass organizations” of peasants, workers and the urban poor, and launch “mass movements.” For the NDs, the “armed struggle” and the “mass movement” were the component forms of their revolutionary struggle. Under Marcos’ martial law, the NDs managed to set up “legal mass organizations,” “legal institutions” and “legal programs,” despite repressive conditions. Working closely with anti-Marcos groups and personages in church institutions and religious-run schools, the SDs set up their own mass organizations and grassroots-oriented programs too. The waning years of the dictatorship saw the proliferation of “cause-oriented groups” involved in the anti-Marcos struggle. With the restoration of democracy, there was a further burgeoning of these organizations, this time called “people’s organizations” (POs) and “non-governmental organizations” (NGOs). “Social movement” was used interchangeably with “mass movement.” Inspired by EDSA I, the framers of the 1987 Constitution recognized the positive role of POs/NGOs in advancing the people’s welfare and interests by enshrining this in the charter itself. While many of today’s POs/NGOs are not leftist in orientation, part of the credit for the proliferation of these vehicles of popular participation belongs to the left.

Within the Philippine left, initial usage of the term “civil society” can be traced to three political blocs – the popdems, Bisig and Pandayan. To these political blocs, two major events provoked interest in the concept of civil society:

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<sup>2</sup> Hilhorst 2003, p. 11.

the “people power” uprising of 1986 (EDSA I) and the collapse of the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe in 1989-92.

According to popdem Oscar Francisco, the post-EDSA I discussions on civil society emanated from four intersecting sources – the academe, the churches, the political blocs, and government and quasi-government institutions. Within the left, the discourse was related to the opportunities opened up by EDSA I as well as to the crisis of the left following the NDs’ disastrous boycott of the 1986 elections. “The failure of the communist party-led political formations to intervene in the 1985-87 conjuncture led many popular organizations to search for non-orthodox analytical means to understand what had happened and, equally important, to guide their next course of action.”<sup>3</sup> The popdems presented “popular democracy” as the “democratic component of national democracy.”<sup>4</sup> In elaborating on popular empowerment and the role of POs/NGOs, some popdems drew from Gramsci’s ideas on hegemony, civil society and the “war of position.”<sup>5</sup>

Gramsci accepted the orthodox Marxist-Leninist position that the state (or “political society”) is the coercive instrument of the ruling class. However, he also put forward the notion that the state, in the broader – and *integral* – sense, consists of political society and civil society, each corresponding to a particular function exercised by the ruling class throughout society – political society, the function of “direct domination” or command, and civil society, the function of “hegemony.” Civil society was “the hegemony of a social group over the entire national society exercised through the so-called private organizations, like the Church, the trade unions, the schools, etc.” Social hegemony meant that the great masses of the population gave their “‘spontaneous’ consent” to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant class.<sup>6</sup> Gramsci contended that in countries like tsarist Russia, where civil society was “primordial and gelatinous,” the capture of state power through a frontal attack – or a “war of movement” (or “maneuver”) – was feasible. However, in advanced capitalist countries, where civil society was more developed, a different strategy had to be employed: a “war of position” – a struggle for hegemony in which the working class would seek to wrest political, intellectual and moral leadership from the bourgeoisie and to build up a multi-class bloc with a new “national-popular

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<sup>3</sup> Francisco 1994, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> De la Torre 1987, pp. 1-10.

<sup>5</sup> This is from my personal recollection of popdem positions in 1986-7.

<sup>6</sup> Gramsci 1971, pp. 12, 56n, 239.

collective will.” In the long term, the counter-hegemony in civil society would come to encompass political society.<sup>7</sup>

“Gramsci,” explained Francisco, “had likened the state to a fort and the trenches it represents to civil society. The popdems argued that to seize the fort, revolutionaries must first overrun the trenches. They also pointed out that it is in civil society where many of the exploitative power relations operate and thus ‘hegemony’ too must be contested here.”<sup>8</sup> The popdems, however, failed to make much headway. Worse, their comrades looked upon them with askance. Steeped in orthodox Marxist-Leninist thinking, mainstream NDs regarded the seizure of state power as the central task of the revolution. To them, Gramsci’s “war of position” was a diversion that could even make people abandon the revolution. To CPP leaders, the popdems exhibited strong tendencies towards “reformism” or “right opportunism.”

The collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe added another element to the discussions on “civil society” within the Philippine left: a critique of Stalinism. “Civil society died with socialism’s coming to power [in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union],” wrote Isagani Serrano. “Socialists minded it only, and in their own peculiar way, while still on the road to power. Then they chose to suppress it when they got there.”<sup>9</sup> In a conference of PO/NGO leaders, Joel Rocamora advocated for a “state and civil society” framework (i.e., counterweight civil society) to fight state encroachments on civil society and to distinguish the societal alternative of the democratic left from that of the Stalinists.<sup>10</sup>

The experience of the Polish workers (Solidarity) in the 1980s has been held up as a prime example of the clash between civil society and a repressive state. Although Gramsci had been mainly concerned with the bourgeois state and civil society, his ideas on hegemony and civil society influenced the Polish workers, who were up against a totalitarian state. Gramsci had associated the state with coercion and force, and civil society with consent (hegemony) and freedom.<sup>11</sup> Solidarity moved towards the contraction of the realm of coercion (state) and the expansion of the realm of freedom (civil society). Instead of directly challenging the state, the workers ignored it and built a democratic, pluralist “parallel society.” By following a strategy of constructing (or resurrecting) civil society, Solidarity as a social movement eventually achieved

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 133, 231-9.

<sup>8</sup> Francisco 1994, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Serrano 1992a, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> PO-NGO Conference 1994, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Gramsci 1971, p. 170.

hegemony in Polish society. The delegitimized and weakened party-state crumbled.<sup>12</sup>

For the emergent groups in the Philippine left, EDSA I and the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe brought the Gramscian concept of civil society to the fore – but along two quite dissimilar threads. EDSA I triggered a conceptualization of civil society as an arena of struggle for hegemony between the oligarchic elite, and the working masses and their allies (hegemonic civil society). The collapse of the socialist regimes thrust the notion of civil society as a countervailing force to the state (counterweight civil society). Hegemonic civil society emphasized the struggle for hegemony within civil society; counterweight civil society focused on the conflict between civil society and the state.

Gramsci's ideas on hegemony, civil society and the "war of position" did not figure as one the main issues of the 1992-93 CPP debate, which centered on the strategy for seizing state power. "Nowhere in the 'Reaffirm-Reject' debate," bewailed Francisco, "does 'civil society' appear as a conceptual tool."<sup>13</sup> The emergent left groups, however, continued to grapple with Gramsci's ideas. By 1993, the new left groups had moved to a post-Marxist perspective on democracy and the democratization process essentially identical with Laclau and Mouffe's strongly Gramsci-influenced "radical democracy" (see pp. 9-10, 13-14).

At the FOPA conference in San Francisco, California, in April 1993, some "rejectionists," together with other non-ND leftists and members of Philippine solidarity groups, arrived at the consensus that political struggle should be viewed "not as a process that led to a climactic seizure of power in the Leninist style but as a gradual process of transformation of the power relationships enveloping society." They saw popular empowerment as "a process of building up a 'parallel power' in 'civil society' that would reduce class power and ultimately transform the exercise of state power." Drawing from Gramsci and some post-Marxist theorists, FOPA defined civil society as "an arena of social and political life autonomous from state domination where progressive values and political parties can be articulated, counter-hegemonic institutions can be created, which can nurture and nourish the creation of autonomous political actors who are able to articulate and defend their interests, propose alternative projects for structuring the state and society, and transform the relations of state and

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<sup>12</sup> Kumar 1993, pp. 386-8. It is very well possible that sections within the anti-authoritarian movements of Eastern Europe and Latin America started out by following Gramsci's main argument on building counter-hegemony *within* civil society, that they managed to gain dominance in the relatively weak and undeveloped civil societies, and that they then shifted to "civil society against the state."



society.” The FOPA participants viewed the hegemonic struggle not just as a class conflict but as a challenge to all relations of inequality and domination.<sup>14</sup> Regarding democracy, Walden Bello, one of FOPA’s main organizers and currently Akbayan honorary chairman, stated: “[R]ather than conceive of an unbridgeable gulf between formal democracy and substantive democracy, we would like to see how substantive democracy can be pushed within the tradition of formal and elite democracy so that there is a continuation in some way, as well as having some elements of a break.”<sup>15</sup>

### ***The Rise of Associational Civil Society***

The popdems achieved normative unity on civil society 1) as a terrain of struggle and 2) as a laboratory to “demonstrate a viable alternative at the local level,”<sup>16</sup> but they also continued to hold on to the view of civil society as counterweight to the state. Making civil society a laboratory for a viable alternative was actually part of the hegemonic struggle, but the popdems wanted to emphasize that they would engage not just in contentious politics,<sup>17</sup> but also in development work. When the popdems, Bisig, Pandayan and Siglaya coalesced and formed a new party, eventually named Akbayan, it essentially adopted the same framework.

Just as the popdems and company were still refining their conceptualization of hegemonic and counterweight civil society, however, the associational version came to the fore in the Philippines, as elsewhere. Foreign funding agencies, the government, church institutions, business groups, etc. began to promote “people’s participation” or “civil society participation” in development, in governance, in election monitoring and voters’ education, in advocacy for human rights, women’s rights, environmental protection, etc., and to emphasize the importance of a strong and vigorous civil society for the country’s democracy. Soon, due in large part to all the promotion for a “strong civil society” by proponents of associational civil society, the term “civil society” became most fashionable.

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<sup>13</sup> Francisco 1994, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Bello 1993, p. 18; Gershman 1993, p. 170. By rejecting “totalizing ideologies” and “centralized direction,” FOPA departed from Gramsci’s adherence to much of orthodox Marxism-Leninism.

<sup>15</sup> Bello 1992, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Francisco 1994, p. 5.

As in many other countries, foreign funding agencies have been the biggest factor in the rise of associational civil society in the Philippines. According to Thomas Carothers, the 1990s have witnessed an upsurge in “democracy assistance” from the U.S. and other international donors to developing countries, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union – an upsurge brought about by a confluence of “the global trend toward democracy, the end of the cold war and new thinking about development.” Aid explicitly for “strengthening civil society” has become a common feature of the assistance package.<sup>18</sup> The Philippines has received “democracy assistance” from many donor countries and agencies, mostly Western. A good part of the aid has gone to POs/NGOs. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), for instance, has extended “civil society grants” to various “civil society organizations” (CSOs) aiming to broaden people’s participation in public policy formulation and implementation. The Philippine government has time and again endorsed a “strong civil society” as well as tried to harness the support of “civil society” for its initiatives. The Aquino administration launched Kabisig to promote closer coordination between government agencies, local governments and POs/NGOs. Ramos endeavored to mobilize civil society support for his social reform agenda.

While viewing the increased attention of funding agencies to the strengthening of civil society as a positive development, Carothers has observed that many of these funders often subscribe to a romantic or stereotyped notion of civil society. They have overstressed, he says, a particular sector: policy-related NGOs carrying out advocacy work and civic education on what the funders consider to be “core democracy issues,” and they have come up with a “denatured, benevolent view of civil society’s role in political life.” By referring to these advocacy NGOs as “civil society organizations,” the funding agencies give the false impression that these few represent the core or the majority of civil society. Furthermore, the funders expect advocacy NGOs to be nonpartisan, even in places where neutrality is difficult to achieve, e.g., where political parties are built mainly on personal loyalties, clan networks and ethnic delineations.<sup>19</sup>

Whether as wholesome bowling leagues and bird-watching societies (associational) or as plucky counter-force to a repressive state (counterweight),

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<sup>17</sup> As used here, contentious politics is collective action in which “ordinary people, often in league with more influential citizens, join forces in confrontations with elites, authorities, and opponents.” (Tarrow 1998, p. 2.)

<sup>18</sup> See Carothers 1999a, p. 44, 207.

<sup>19</sup> Carothers 1999a, pp. 221-2, 248.

civil society has been made to seem “warm and fuzzy,” when it is actually “a bewildering array of the good, the bad, and the outright bizarre.”<sup>20</sup> For over a decade now, many critics have showed up the flaws and weaknesses in the two main versions of the “civil society argument.” Contrary to the assertions of advocates of associational civil society, a strong and vibrant civil society can have negative effects on democracy or democratization. Where political institutions and structures are weak, for instance, it may pave the way for fascist dictatorship (e.g., Weimar Germany and Mussolini’s Italy),<sup>21</sup> and foster further divisiveness in societies already fractured along ethno-regional and sectarian lines (Africa).<sup>22</sup> A dense civil society may very well consist of both democratic and anti-democratic associations, liberal and illiberal organizations, civic and un-civic groups.<sup>23</sup> Hence, there is “civil” and “uncivil society,” or “good civil society” and “bad civil society.”<sup>24</sup> Civil society may have negligible impact on interpersonal trust,<sup>25</sup> and associational life may breed both social and “unsocial” capital.<sup>26</sup> Counterweight civil society tends at times to emphasize civil society as the dichotomous opposite of the state. Such a dichotomy brings about such problems as “the idealisation of civil society; the fostering of a zero-sum conception of the relationship between state and civil society; the obscuring of attempts to gain state power to shape relationships in civil society; and the conceptual concealment of those ambiguous but significant relationships between state and society.”<sup>27</sup> Both associational civil society (in its neo-Tocquevillean form) and counterweight civil society tend to marginalize political organizations, especially parties.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the biggest problem with both associational and counterweight civil society, however, is that they tend to downplay the importance of gross inequalities of power and resources within civil society,<sup>29</sup> and to gloss over “the real, and often sharp, conflicts among groups in civil society.”<sup>30</sup> (For many developing countries, a question more basic than bowling alone or in a league is whether the masses can afford such a pastime of the rich and the middle class.)

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<sup>20</sup> Carothers 1999b, p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> Berman 1997, pp. 401-29; Putzel 1997, pp. 939-949.

<sup>22</sup> Encarnacion 2000, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Foley 1996, pp. 67-104; Tamir 1998, pp. 214-238.

<sup>24</sup> Kopstein and Hanson 1998, pp. 369-375; Chambers and Kopstein 2001, pp. 837-65.

<sup>25</sup> Booth and Richard 2001, p. 50.

<sup>26</sup> Levi 1996, pp. 45-55.

<sup>27</sup> Rodan 1996b, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Foley and Edwards 1996, p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> Rodan 1996b, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Foley and Edwards (1996, p. 40) apply this only to “Civil Society I,” but it holds for “Civil Society II” as well.

Associational civil society appears to be the version of civil society that “revisionist neoliberalism” promotes. According to Giles Mohan and Kristian Stokke, neoliberal development strategy, while continuing to stress market deregulation, now gives attention to institutional reforms and social development too. Under revised neoliberalism, civil society has become an arena for attaining development objectives. Its role, however, is merely to “exert organised pressure on autocratic and unresponsive states and thereby support democratic stability and good governance.” Revisionist neoliberals base their notion of participation and empowerment on a “harmony model of power,” which holds that “the empowerment of the powerless could be achieved within the existing social order without any significant negative effects upon the power of the powerful.”<sup>31</sup>

In the early 1990s, left groups in the Philippines outside of the popdems, Bisig and Pandayan were reluctant to use the term “civil society.” With all the hoopla – and funding – revolving around associational civil society-type of projects, however, many left-aligned POs/NGOs as well as left political blocs, including those identified with the NDs, soon clambered on to the civil society bandwagon. The legal left substituted or alternated such old terms as “mass organizations” and “mass movements” with “civil society” or portrayed allied POs/NGOs as being the most active or even the leading sector of civil society. In communicating with the masses, left activists simply used “civil society” and did not bother to find or coin a vernacular term for the English term. The “rejectionist” Marxist-Leninist parties, despite the enthusiastic use of “civil society” by the legal political blocs aligned with them, remained suspicious, partly in reaction to the aggressive propagation of associational civil society by powerful entities. One waxed critical of the moves of the World Bank, the Catholic Church and President Ramos, among others, to use the civil society concept for their own ends.<sup>32</sup>

Since the 1990s, Philippine civil society has been a battleground for contending views of the civil society argument: associational, counterweight and hegemonic. Left parties and groups – even those that basically remained in the “mass movement” framework and merely wanted to ride on warm and fuzzy civil society – had to deal with associational civil society. The pitch of the big institutional players for “strengthening civil society” was almost overwhelming. POs/NGOs aligned with these left groups could not but be affected by all “strong

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<sup>31</sup> Mohan and Stokke 2000, pp. 248-9. I wish to thank Silvia Sanz-Ramos Rojo and Joel Rocamora for drawing my attention to Mohan and Stokke’s article.

<sup>32</sup> *Rebolusyong Partido ng Manggagawa - Pilipinas* 2000, pp. 22-3.

civil society” hype as they too were recipients of foreign funding. As is well-known, Philippine NGOs like their counterparts in other developing countries, are heavily dependent on foreign funding, and many international donor agencies impose their views on how their work should proceed.<sup>33</sup> Ben Reid argues that the Philippine government has succeeded in coopting SD “CSOs” by drawing key SD figures into government and getting the “CSOs” involved in the planning and implementation of its “poverty alleviation” programs.<sup>34</sup>

### ***“NGO Movement” vs. Political Party***

According to Foley and Edwards, both “Civil Society I” (associational) and “Civil Society II” (counterweight) tend to undervalue specifically political associations, especially parties. Associational civil society stresses “the political benefits of an apolitical civil society,” while counterweight civil society centers on “politically mobilized social actors outside customary political associations.”<sup>35</sup> The downplaying of political parties showed up in the Philippines too, and affected the left. A book that surprisingly had considerable influence in some leftist circles stressed the role of civil society as a primary agent of development, expounded on four generations or stages of strategies of development-oriented POs/NGOs (including national and global networks for the fourth stage), and ignored political movements, organizations and parties – as if POs/NGOs had no links with them whatsoever.<sup>36</sup>

After the CPP split and failed attempts at uniting SD groups, many leftists who had quit, been expelled or cut themselves off from the CPP and the PDSP continued to be actively involved in small political groups and/or POs/NGOs. Among themselves, however, the “rejectionists” found it difficult to overcome ideological, political and even personal differences. Meanwhile, people who had left or broken off with PDSP were likewise unable to form a new party. With the new left forces in disarray, many former ND cadres and activists began to distance themselves from the political groups, limit their political activities and focus on PO/NGO work. A good number even dropped all involvement in political activities. Non-ND POs/NGOs, on the other hand, had “a strong anti-statist bias partly in reaction to ND conceptions of alternative political and economic organization.” PO/NGO activists, in general, had come to “abhor

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<sup>33</sup> Mendoza 1995, pp. 143-172.

<sup>34</sup> Reid 2004, pp. 29-40.

<sup>35</sup> Foley and Edwards 1996, p. 42.

<sup>36</sup> Korten 1990.

traditional politicians with a passion approaching moral revulsion.”<sup>37</sup> Often heard were comments like “NGOs and politics should never mix,” which suggested that NGOs should restrict themselves to development and leave politics to the politicians.<sup>38</sup> Many POs/NGOs aligned with left groups simply drifted away from them.

On the other hand, as POs/NGOs became increasingly assertive, many observers perceived them as playing a more important political role. POs/NGOs were reputedly taking the lead not only in development efforts,<sup>39</sup> but also in the democratization process, in fact taking the place of conventional actors (political parties and interest groups) in the latter.<sup>40</sup> In championing the interests of the underprivileged and advancing the “struggle for civil society,” NGOs had become a new “political opposition.”<sup>41</sup> NGOs filled a vacuum left by the political party system by articulating the political demands of subordinate classes and sectors and middle class sections alienated from the traditional political parties.<sup>42</sup> Some prominent leftists as well as some scholars wrote about the “NGO movement” and “NGOs as a social movement.”<sup>43</sup> When the Communist Party of Thailand collapsed in the 1980s, many former cadres and activists eventually found their way into NGOs, which began to resemble a social movement, and into pro-capitalist parties.<sup>44</sup> After the CPP split, a similar possibility for former CPP/ND cadres and activists loomed. Many within the emergent left groups, however, still believed in the necessity of a political party – not one to replace POs/NGOs but one with deep roots in, and close ties with, the progressive PO/NGO community. Of what use is a strong and vibrant civil society, if at the end of the day, the oligarchic elite and the *trapo* parties still call the shots?

Engagement in elections proved decisive in resolving the political party question. A few years before the CPP split, there were already some left groups and individuals within as well as outside the ND and SD ranks that wanted to take the electoral struggle more seriously. They refused to take the CPP’s very tactical view of elections and to move along with PDSP’s rightward drift. Using an argument somewhat akin to hegemonic civil society, popdem Eric Gutierrez urged fellow NDs to view elections not merely as a process for the reproduction

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<sup>37</sup> Morales 1993, p. viii.

<sup>38</sup> Serrano 1992b, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Goertzen 1991, p. 20; Brillantes 1994, p. 584.

<sup>40</sup> Tigno 1993, p. 60.

<sup>41</sup> Hewison and Rodan 1996, p. 63.

<sup>42</sup> Gerard Clarke, as cited in Melegrito and Mendoza 1999, p. 247.

<sup>43</sup> Morales 1993, p. vii; Lopa 1995, p. 37-71; Alegre 1996, pp. 2-48.

<sup>44</sup> Ungpakorn 2003, chapter 10; Chutima 1994, pp. 146-7; Maisirikrod 1997, p. 155.

of the dominant classes and their form of rule, but as “‘sites of struggle,’ which the Left must wrest from the dominant classes in the process of countering their hegemony.”<sup>45</sup> The popdems, Pandayan and Bisig worked together to rejuvenate the left’s electoral challenge. In 1990, they launched “Project 1992,” aiming to build a national “center-left” coalition for the 1992 general elections. Failing to draw in the mainstream NDs and SDs, the project fell through. Unfazed, the threesome poured their energies into “Project 2001” – “an electoral movement of the NGO community.” Involved in the project were various PO and NGO alliances from all over the country, including the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO), the largest coalition of NGOs. Former Congressman Florencio Abad, one of Project 2001’s main initiators, proposed that the PO-NGO community intervene in the electoral process in four ways: raising political consciousness, lobbying for electoral reforms, developing a people’s platform, and giving actual support to specific candidates. The CODE-NGO, however, balked on the fourth point. To avoid a split, Project 2001 refrained from endorsing candidates. Frustrated once again, the popdems, Pandayan and Bisig formed themselves into Akbayan,<sup>46</sup> a loose, non-party formation. Akbayan adopted the development agenda of Project 2001 and endorsed the electoral ticket headed by Senators Jovito Salonga and Aquilino Pimentel, Jr. The Salonga-Pimentel slate lost badly.<sup>47</sup> To those in Akbayan itself, it was clear that the grassroots strength of the political blocs and POs/NGOs had not proven sufficient enough to be translated into an electoral force.<sup>48</sup> Mainstream NDs crowed that Akbayan had been reduced to being a mere “support appendage” with no say in crucial decision-making in the Salonga-Pimentel coalition and that the “broadly-based NGO electoral movement” Akbayan counted on had failed to deliver.<sup>49</sup>

The 1993 FOPA conference emphatically rejected the idea of a party-less “NGO movement”:

“A loose coalition or aggregation of PO’s and NGO’s does not a political movement make. NGO’s and PO’s serve to articulate the diverse community and sectoral demands of civil society, not to serve as 1001 substitutes for a political movement ... The role of a political

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<sup>45</sup> Gutierrez 1994b, p. 105.

<sup>46</sup> This is the precursor of the political party.

<sup>47</sup> Out of seven presidential aspirants, Salonga landed sixth, getting even less votes than Imelda Marcos.

<sup>48</sup> Valte 1992, p. 5.

movement is to comprehensively articulate different issues into a vision and political program, draw support from a variety of issue-based civil society-based coalitions without absorbing them or being absorbed by them, and organize this support from organized civil society and unorganized citizenry into a bid for state power.”

FOPA specified a political party as the appropriate agent for articulating a comprehensive vision of change. The political movement would contend in different political arenas – in mass movements and, “especially under a regime of elite democracy, in the electoral struggle, which is, whether we like it or not, the current source of legitimacy on who governs.”<sup>50</sup>

The idea of a political party prevailed over “NGO movement” ... but perhaps to a fault. Due to continuing ideological and political differences, the emergent left groups formed several parties instead of just one.

### ***Civil Society as a Terrain of Struggle***

For the Philippine left, “mass movements” or “social movements” have been the most common manifestation of popular participation in politics. In fact, they are an area in which the left has achieved a certain level of expertise. This comes not from studying “academic” social movement theory, but from years and years of practical experience, and a little “guidance” from the writings of Marxist as well as non-Marxist left thinkers. Through regular assessments of the national situation and the international situation, CPP/ND cadres and activists have often managed to gauge what has now been dubbed in social movement theory as the “political opportunity structure.” They have “aroused, organized and mobilized” peasants, workers, women, youth and students, etc., to mount “contentious” collective challenges against the state and the powers-that-be. In the course of setting the “tactical political line” and conducting “propaganda work,” they have done “framing work” – turning grievances into broader and more resonant claims and rousing ‘hot cognitions’ around them, as Sidney Tarrow defines it.<sup>51</sup> By forging coalitions, expanding organizations and networks and launching campaign after campaign, they have been able many times to sustain collective

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<sup>49</sup> *Partido ng Bayan* 1993, p. 52.

<sup>50</sup> Bello 1993, pp. 20-1, Gershman 1993, p. 172.

<sup>51</sup> Tarrow 1998, p. 21.



action and a few times to help bring about “cycles of contention” or, as in January 2001, even popular uprising.

As early as the Aquino period, POs/NGOs participating in policy-making, including many aligned with emergent left groups, had learned how to employ “programmatic demand making.” Magadia defines this as “the presentation and communication to government of an articulated position regarding a policy issue, wherein societal concerns are expressed comprehensively, as to include general principles, particular provisions, and even some implementing guidelines.” Apart from staging rallies and demonstrations and airing their views in the mass media, coalitions such as the Congress for a People’s Agrarian Reform (CPAR), Labor Advisory and Consultative Council (LACC), Urban Land Reform Task Force (ULR-TF) and Philippine Drug Action Network (PDAN) participated in varying levels in public hearings, congressional committee hearings, discussions with legislators, etc. in pushing for agrarian reform, labor relations reform, urban land reform and the passage of the generic drug policy, respectively. In the case of CPAR and LACC, programmatic demand making reached the most advanced form – “a proposal in actual legislative format.” Agrarian reform generated tremendous public support: “almost all major sectoral organizations, and many respected and well-known individuals issued position statements or solidarity statements on agrarian reform in general, or on particular aspects of the proposed alternatives.” Of the four policy areas mentioned, agrarian reform had the highest intensity of “political catalysis.” In the end, however, the landlord-honeycombed Congress considerably watered down key provisions of the main agrarian reform bill. CPAR regarded the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law of 1988 as a victory of the landed elite. Congress likewise passed Republic Act 6715, a labor relations law, which the LACC denounced as anti-labor. However, despite a medium level of PO/NGO participation and mobilization and of political catalysis, the urban land reform movement succeeded in getting the pro-urban poor Urban Development and Housing Act enacted and signed into law. The PDAN likewise succeeded with the Generic Drugs Act.<sup>52</sup> Left groups and allied POs/NGOs scored their biggest victory in policy-making participation during Aquino’s time when the Philippine Senate rejected the extension of the US military bases agreement after huge demonstrations and strong lobbying by the broad anti-US bases movement. The US bases policy area probably exceeded even agrarian reform in the intensity of political catalysis.

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<sup>52</sup> Magadia 2003, chapters I-VI.

During the Ramos period, two cases of overseas Filipino workers sentenced to death triggered massive protests in the Philippines as well as in the overseas Filipino (OF) community. In the case of Flor Contemplacion, a Filipino maid who was hanged for the murder of her six-year-old ward and of another Filipino maid in Singapore, the protests were not only directed against the Singaporean government but also against the Philippine government, which was reported to have done little to help her. Several months later, when Sarah Balabagan was sentenced to death in Saudi Arabia for killing her employer who had raped her, the outpouring of protest prompted the Philippine government to intervene. She was eventually released. POs/NGOs linked with the left participated actively in the protests.

For the emergent left groups, many of which have come from ND and SD ranks, civil society has been more than just a familiar terrain of struggle. Over the past decade, they seem to have made their mark in social movements and to be holding their own vis-à-vis the NDs, doing even better than the NDs in certain sectors and areas.

With substantial bases in the rural areas, Akbayan, ABA-AKO and the Marxist-Leninist “rejectionist” parties have been actively involved in the struggles of peasants on such issues as agrarian reform, landgrabbing, recognition of land titles, land conversion, the coconut levy, etc. Three of the country’s biggest peasant federations are affiliated with Akbayan, and these federations are part of two of the biggest PO-NGO coalitions pushing for agrarian reform, the Partnership for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development Services (PARRDS) and the People’s Campaign for Agrarian Reform Network. ABA-AKO is backed by the half-century-old Federation of Free Farmers, still one of the country’s largest peasant federations. In actual membership, the peasant federations affiliated with Akbayan and ABA-AKO now probably far outstrip the NDs’ open peasant organizations, but the latter can rely on the rural mass base of the CPP-NPA for its peasant mobilizations. RPM-P, MLPP and RPM-M are particularly strong in former CPP-NPA guerrilla zones in Western Visayas, Central Luzon and Central Mindanao, respectively.

POs/NGOs currently aligned with Akbayan and ABA-AKO have been in the forefront of the struggle for agrarian reform, striving to make the most out of the 1988 agrarian reform law while continuing to explore possibilities for more progressive legislation. During the Ramos and Estrada periods, PARRDS adopted a “*bibingka* strategy” of forging coalitions between pro-agrarian reform forces “from below” (social movement actors) and “from above” (“state

reformists" like Agrarian Reform Secretaries Ernesto Garilao and Horacio Morales, Jr.).<sup>53</sup> Other peasant and agrarian reform groups, however, became increasingly critical of the slow pace of agrarian reform implementation under Estrada-Morales, and Morales' alleged partiality towards certain peasant groups. Frictions arose within the agrarian reform PO/NGO community, and within Akbayan. After Estrada's fall, the dissonance somewhat subsided.

PMP and Akbayan are strong in the labor sector. Two large labor centers are aligned or affiliated with them – *Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino* (BMP) or Solidarity of Filipino Workers with PMP, and the Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL) with Akbayan. BMP broke away from the CPP-aligned labor center in 1993, at the time of the CPP split. To distinguish itself from the ND labor movement, BMP describes itself as being "militant, socialist and democratic." APL, established in 1996 after ten years of labor organizing by Bisig, Pandayan and independents, espouses "social movement unionism." BMP and APL each have a few hundred local affiliates – labor unions and associations – with tens of thousands of members. Apart from fighting for workers' rights and welfare at the factory or plantation level, BMP and APL have also been active in struggles for wage increase, tax cuts, rollback of oil prices and of water and electricity rates, repeal of anti-labor laws, etc., as well as on national political and social issues. Among the organizations of government employees, the Akbayan-affiliated Confederation of Independent Unions is now the largest federation. Also aligned with PMP is the *Kongreso ng Pagkakaisa ng Maralitang Lungsod* (KPML) or Unity Congress of the Urban Poor, the biggest coalition of organizations of urban poor communities, particularly strong in Metro Manila. ABA-AKO and Akbayan also have strong affiliate organizations in urban poor areas.

Abanse Pinay has its main base in the women's movement, but other groups like Akbayan and PMP have many members and allies in women's groups too. They have all worked for women's empowerment, ending unequal power relations between the sexes and for the passage of laws related to women-trafficking, domestic violence, etc. The emergent left parties and groups also have POs/NGOs aligned with them in other sectors (youth and students, other professionals, overseas Filipinos, etc.) and communities (the Moro people and other indigenous peoples). In line with its "tri-people approach," the Mindanao-based RPM-M has helped organize and maintained close links with POs/NGOs of

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<sup>53</sup> Borras 1999. Morales, a popdem leader, was formerly the president of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM), a development NGO.

Christians, Moros and *lumad* (non-Moro indigenous peoples) in war-torn Mindanao, opposed military escalation time and again, and undertaken peace-building initiatives.

In recent years, the emergent left parties and groups and allied POs/NGOs have been able to stage bigger and bigger rallies and demonstrations and waged wide mass campaigns over various issues. On such red-letter occasions as the President's state of the nation address, labor day and human rights day, the new left groups have aired out their denunciations or criticisms of government policies, as well as their advocacies. They have also been quick to react to important developments, and have had a share in some big successes. Foremost among the victories of the popular movement was, of course, People Power II, which will be discussed later. In 2002, the new left parties, among others, energetically campaigned against the "purchased power adjustment", an electricity surcharge imposed by the country's main electricity firm, Meralco. The Supreme Court eventually declared the surcharge illegal and found Meralco, owned by the powerful Lopez clan, guilty of overcharging.<sup>54</sup> Last year, some new left groups participated actively in the movement that successfully stopped the impeachment of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Hilario Davide. The impeachment, apparently based on flimsy charges, had been initiated by politicians identified with Eduardo Cojuangco, a former Marcos crony, whose business interests had been adversely affected by recent Supreme Court rulings. This year, after a Filipino driver, Angelo de la Cruz, was taken hostage by an extremist group in Iraq, all left groups, which had earlier vigorously opposed the Philippines' participation in the Iraq war, joined broad sections of Filipinos (especially those overseas) in calling for the immediate withdrawal of Philippine troops from Iraq. Fearful of another mighty political storm over the plight of overseas Filipino workers, Arroyo, erstwhile one of Washington's most reliable allies in the "Coalition of the Willing," wilted.

Many left-aligned POs/NGOs have managed to engage in left and contentious politics despite the bias for "nonpartisan" (or apolitical) and not-too-contentious advocacy work of donor agencies funding them. Although funding institutions in general propagate the "strengthen civil society" line, "[n]ot all donor institutions ... are directly or entirely influenced by Putnam's prescriptions."<sup>55</sup> Many of them put stress on grassroots or grassroots-oriented organizations – peasant associations, trade unions and women's groups, etc., and

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<sup>54</sup> Nuguid and Quezon 2003, pp. 2-3

<sup>55</sup> Howell and Pearce 2001, p. 41.

NGOs servicing them – not bowling leagues. There is a whole of a difference. According to Huber et al., bowling leagues and choral groups “strengthen civil society without doing much for political participation or class organization”; the League of Women Voters strengthens both civil society and political participation; and trade unions and peasant associations strengthen civil society, political participation and class organization.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, many aid programs promoting a “strong civil society” such as “people’s participation in governance” and “women and development” provide opportunities for militant activism.

Through contentious politics, the emergent left parties and groups and allied POs/NGOs have sought to bring the issues and concerns of subordinate classes and groups into the mainstream of public discourse and debate. The engagement of the Marxist-Leninist “rejectionist” parties in mass movements has still been very much influenced by an anti-systemic orientation – “expose and oppose” the “reactionary” state in order to bring it down. The engagement of Akbayan and ABA-AKO, on the other hand, has been transformation-oriented rather than anti-systemic. In line with its hegemonic struggle framework, Akbayan has geared its actions towards changing the balance of power among social classes and groups and eventually transforming the exercise of state power. On the whole, however, the new left groups have been moving towards combining protest with advocacy, and “exposing and opposing” with “proposing” alternative projects and policies.

Over the past decade or so, coalitions of POs/NGOs aligned with different new left parties have been slow in arising. In the heyday of coalitions in the late 1980s and early 1990s, POs/NGOs with or without alignments to left groups had forged broad coalitions on a variety of issues and concerns – agrarian reform, labor, urban poor, women’s issues, human rights, development, US bases, debt, peace, health, environment, etc.<sup>57</sup> The coalitions were able “to provide important fora to coordinate advocacy work, develop experiences together on campaigns, and to develop analyses and strategies that genuinely cross-cut some of the traditional divisions between the political blocs.”<sup>58</sup> Most of these coalitions, e.g., CPAR, LACC and ULR-TF, no longer exist. Among the factors that brought about their demise were ideological or political differences, perceived ND “vanguardism” and the CPP split.

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<sup>56</sup> Huber et al. 1997, p. 328.

<sup>57</sup> For a detailed discussion on coalition experiences during this period, see Cala and Grageda 1994 and Magadia 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Gershman 1993, p. 159.

Of late, the emergent left forces have tried to develop more collaborative relations among themselves. Factors such as the Lagman killing,<sup>59</sup> differing stances towards pro-Estrada forces and the Arroyo government, and personal grudges, however, have sometimes gotten in the way. Coalitions and common projects with the NDs (“reaffirmists”) have been rare, as the NDs still basically view the new left forces as “counter-revolutionaries.” Among the old coalitions, the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) is the only one surviving that still has several political blocs in it – but now excluding the NDs (“reaffirmists”). The emergent left groups and their networks conducted a joint international solidarity conference in August 2001. Various new left forces, together with many allied POs/NGOs, coalesced in February 2002 to oppose the deployment of US military “advisers” to train Philippines troops fighting the Abu Sayyaf. They set up the Gathering for Peace, a broad coalition against the presence of US troops in the Philippines and against US intervention in the Philippine affairs. Most significantly, over 800 representatives of various new left groups and allied POs/NGOs assembled for a “people’s summit” called “Alternatiba” in November 2003 to forge a new coalition against a governance of elite rule.

### ***Civil Society as a Laboratory for a Viable Alternative***

In the struggle against elite rule, the Philippine left has often engaged in either armed struggle or in contentious forms of open, legal struggle – mass demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, etc. Since EDSA I, however, emergent left forces, apart from persevering with social movements, have pursued the hegemonic struggle in another way, a largely non-contentious form: development work. Civil society, in this case, serves as a laboratory for a viable left alternative. Development work, being a political concern, is another sphere for popular participation in politics. In usual patronage politics, *trapos* extend privileges or make accommodations to their relatives, benefactors and friends, often compromising or setting back development endeavors. The *trapos* make or unmake development decisions without bothering to consult their constituencies. With patronage giving way more and more to predation, development has become almost a pipe dream for Filipinos in many areas. Through their

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<sup>59</sup> The assassination of PMP founder Filemon Lagman in February 2001 remains unsolved. Among those suspected of perpetrating the murder are the CPP, elements in the AFP, powerful politicians and crime syndicates. Also being entertained, however, is the possibility that Lagman’s murder may have had to do with the fissures of the late 1990s.

engagement in development work, the new left groups hope to show concretely the contrast between *trapo* and progressive, and between non-participatory and participatory development models. Development work, clarifies Llamas, is meant not to be a mere palliative to social ills but to provide “a concrete example of a socialist future.”<sup>60</sup>

The few NGOs that existed in the 1950s until the mid-60s viewed their role in terms of “community development,” basically an extension of the Christian ethic of attending to the needs of the poor. Community development work ranged from charity to building sanitary toilets, promoting better nutrition, adult literacy education, increasing agricultural productivity without changing tenurial systems, etc. With Vatican II and with the rise of protest movements worldwide in the late 1960s, however, some community development workers began to emphasize the need for changing social structures and for people’s participation (particularly the participation of the “poor, deprived and oppressed”) in this process of change. The concept of “community organizing” was born, and both NDs and SDs engaged in it. At a time of a worsening political situation in the Philippines, community organizing veered toward mass protest actions – “pressure” or contentious politics.<sup>61</sup>

Under martial law, NDs and SDs employed community organizing methods in grassroots organizing in both urban and rural areas, eventually in building progressive “basic Christian communities,” community-based health programs, etc. In the late 1970s, however, the NDs discarded the “community organizing approach,” and adopted more “revolutionary” forms of organizing. Programs employing the former approach, especially those of a socio-economic nature, were seen as tending towards “reformism,” “economism,” “localism” and “churchiness.”<sup>62</sup> Despite the shift to “revolutionary” organizing, NDs continued to pursue “socio-economic” projects, or at least to solicit funding for such projects without necessarily implementing them. Large amounts of development aid were diverted to the revolutionary underground.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, some ND-

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<sup>60</sup> Llamas 1996, p. 72.

<sup>61</sup> Bulatao 1995, pp. 1-3.

<sup>62</sup> Peasant Secretariat, CPP 1978.

<sup>63</sup> Here I write from direct experience, having been a leading cadre of the CPP in Mindanao, then in international work. In the late 1970s, the CPP laid out elaborate finance policies and procedures on how such funds should be diverted. Before a project proposal would be submitted to a funding agency, party cadres in the legal organization or program concerned had to get clearance from party higher organs on how much of the project funds would actually be used and how much would be “centralized.” Projects were categorized – “ghost projects,” those to be given “credible reality” and those that were for “partial” or “full implementation.” To ensure that big amounts could be “centralized,” budgets were often inflated.

aligned NGOs, especially in Mindanao, did undertake “socio-economic work” (SEW) geared towards improving the people’s livelihood.

After the fall of Marcos, NGOs engaged in SEW or “development work” became more numerous, even as POs/NGOs engaged in “pressure” politics continued to proliferate. Development NGOs, including those ND-aligned, were able to establish relatively secure bases at the *barangay* (village) level. “SEW practitioners” insisted that social change is achieved not just through the seizure of state power and the destruction of structures perpetuating inequity and oppression, but also through “creating structures and new ways of thinking and of living.” They stressed that “the basic activity of SEW is empowerment of people.”<sup>64</sup> Horacio Morales, Jr., president of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM), described empowerment as “the process of shifting the balance of social power from one social class or group of classes to another, which may include the shift in economic or political importance between areas or regions, resulting in a new power configuration.”<sup>65</sup> There was growing recognition of the need to shift from too much contentious politics to engagement in projects concretely uplifting the conditions of the poor and marginalized. Only late in the Aquino period, however, did the NDs seriously involved in development work gain greater appreciation for their work.<sup>66</sup> By then, however, the CPP was on the verge of a split.

In Rocamora’s analysis, the CPP split, the worldwide crisis of socialism and a perceived change in Philippine political economy pushed development NGOs and the progressive movement as a whole to a strategic reorientation regarding development work. The “irreducible foundation” of the new framework was “a commitment to place the interests and the organizations of poor and oppressed communities as the centerpiece of an alternative society and the strategy for achieving this society.” The new paradigm saw a process of building from the ground up. “Simple accumulation of power” at the local level – i.e., building more and more POs and more and more livelihood projects – would pave the way for “complex accumulation of power,” which would require doing battle with local elite power structures in different arenas, including elections and governance.<sup>67</sup>

From *barangay*-based, small-scale livelihood and other socio-economic projects, POs/NGOs engaged in development work moved on to “integrated area

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<sup>64</sup> Calaguas 1989, p. 9.

<sup>65</sup> Morales 1990, p. 55.

<sup>66</sup> Rocamora 1994b, p. 50.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 54-7, 60-1.



development" (IAD), which blended progressive elements of community development and community organizing, covered much wider areas and was complemented by PO/NGO national advocacy work. IAD was by no means an original idea of the left; it was, in fact, a brainchild of the government. The first government IAD projects in the 1970s consisted of an integrated package of infrastructure investments. In the 1980s, the package was broadened to include rural services (e.g., credit extension and marketing) and institutional strengthening. When progressive NGOs undertook their own IAD in the 1990s, they set growth as well as equity as their aims. The concept of institutional strengthening was itself broadened to include trainings on popular participation, governance and empowerment, as well as more traditional skill-building. Community organizing was a crucial component of the NGOs' IAD strategy, facilitating the formation of POs and training of PO leaders. Other important elements of the strategy were socio-economic work and effective resource mobilization and management. IAD soon became "sustainable integrated area development" (SIAD), as the POs/NGOs involved in it felt that the question of ecological balance had to be more adequately addressed.

IAD/SIAD programs have increasingly become joint endeavors between POs/NGOs and governmental organizations (GOs). For many community organizers, especially those who had experienced repression under Marcos, working with government as partner did not come easily. They were accustomed to dealing with government as adversary. For a time, some of them seemed to be gripped with a great fear of being co-opted by the government. Gradually, however, they realized that they had to work with GOs if they wanted to achieve their development goals fully. "Somehow," Tomasito Villarin, former executive director of Kaisahan and current executive director of the Institute of Politics and Governance (IPG), pointed out, "a political-developmental framework that defines project objectives within the broader objective of changing power relations and building up a just, equitable and humane society is needed. NGOs do not exist in a vacuum nor does the implementation of development projects."<sup>68</sup>

Initial IAD/SIAD programs have come up with fairly encouraging results. In Antique province, for instance, seven years of the Antique Integrated Area Development (Aniad) resulted in the development of some organizational systems in participating POs; greater assertiveness of POs in demanding proper services and greater government responsiveness to community needs, including

basic services and affordable credit; increased government recognition of the role of POs/NGOs in local development; improved land tenure arrangements for many farmers; widespread adoption and adaptation of ecologically sound, integrated pest management; and increased appreciation of the role of women. Nonetheless, Aniad assessments showed that much work still had to be done, as the economic situation of many households had not structurally changed; land tenure arrangements for many other farmers had not improved; critical consciousness and awareness were limited to a few people; and most POs still came up short in reach, quality and stability or durability.<sup>69</sup>

Despite a growing number of success stories of PO-NGO-GO cooperation, state manipulation of development initiatives from civil society remains a problem. According to James Putzel, NGOs endeavoring to deliver services to the rural poor have had to compromise with the state and, in many cases, have ended up legitimizing deeply flawed government programs. Moreover, in some cases, the state, after adopting certain programs originating in NGO grassroots work, has perverted their original “people-oriented” thrust.<sup>70</sup>

The emergent left parties and groups, in varying degrees, are all engaged in development work. Akbayan appears to have gone much farther than the others in this arena, especially with regards IAD/SIAD. Furthermore, Akbayan has seized upon the opportunities opened by the Local Government Code of 1991, which provided for decentralization and PO/NGO participation in local governments, to promote “people’s participation in governance.” Akbayan and allied NGOs have conducted trainings all over the country on barangay governance, including barangay development planning and budgeting through participatory rural appraisal. Extending Gramscian “counter-hegemony” beyond civil society, Villarín contended that POs/NGOs engaging with the state should always view it as a “non-monolithic institution” and treat it as an “arena of struggle.”<sup>71</sup>

### ***Civil Society as Counterweight to the State***

The ouster of Marcos by “people power” in 1986, with a prominent role played by “cause-oriented groups,” essentially followed the same “civil society against the state” logic of counterweight civil society that characterized the anti-

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<sup>68</sup> Villarín 2000, p. 32.

<sup>69</sup> Vandenbroeck 1998, pp. 5-6, 44.

<sup>70</sup> Putzel 1998, pp. 100-102.

<sup>71</sup> Villarín 2000, p. 32.

authoritarian struggles in Eastern Europe and Latin America. In the early 1990s, when counterweight civil society gained some adherents in the Philippine left, however, it seemed to lack sting. Build or resurrect civil society? Philippine civil society was already flourishing. In fact, Canadian Embassy officials then already described Philippine NGOs as “the most organized and well-developed NGO community in the world.”<sup>72</sup> The Philippines is now reputed to have the third largest PO/NGO community in the developing world, behind Brazil and India, and the largest in per capita terms.<sup>73</sup> Pit civil society against the state? There were still human rights violations, but the state was not as repressive as under Marcos. Moreover, the Aquino and Ramos administrations enjoyed the support of large sections of civil society.

Those in the left who did try to pursue counterweight civil society managed to expose government abuses, wrong-headed government policies, the usual graft and corruption, bureaucratic foul-ups, etc. – but nothing so serious as to lead to a confrontation between civil society and the state. For the emergent left groups, the actual value of counterweight civil society seemed to be more in terms of helping stamp out whatever vestiges of Stalinist thinking still remained within their ranks ... But then along came “*jueteng*-gate,” a scandal which implicated President Joseph Estrada in a nationwide racket of the popular but illegal numbers game. Soon enough, all sorts of groups called for his resignation or ouster.

In January 2001, “people power” toppled the boss-president Estrada, after impeachment proceedings against him collapsed. EDSA II marked the high point of the engagement of the emergent left forces in civil society and in their coalition efforts. Unlike in EDSA I, when the bulk of the left missed out as a result of their boycott of the presidential elections, practically all left forces – the emergent left forces, as well as the mainstream NDs and SDs – were in EDSA II. Several coalitions were involved in what Ricardo Reyes loftily described as “an uprising of civil society.” The NDs formed their own Erap Resign Movement. The emergent left forces joined the much larger and broader coalition, Congress of Filipino Citizens 2 (Kompil 2), which took after the first Kompil that fought the Marcos dictatorship. “Kompil 2 as a broad, loose and pluralist coalition,” observed Reyes, “held fast to its identity as a civil society opposition movement distinct from the political opposition formed by traditional opposition political parties. Requests by politicians to join the coalition were politely turned down.

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<sup>72</sup> Goertzen 1991, p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> Clarke 1998, pp. 193, 200-201.

But party-list groups were allowed to participate in recognition of their grassroots nature and transformative politics.”<sup>74</sup> Maintaining unity within Kompil 2 proved a trying task. Unlike most groups which focused on Estrada’s ouster, PMP and the POs/NGOs aligned with it were critical not just of Estrada but of Vice-President Arroyo as well, and advocated for a more radical position: Resign All! PMP and allied groups initiated another coalition bearing such a position, People’s Action to Remove Erap, but remained in Kompil 2.

Both EDSA I and II were uprisings of civil society that overthrew a corrupt president. Indeed, Marcos and Estrada were infamous for their corrupt, patrimonial and plunderous ways. In the sense that EDSA II was directed at overthrowing a corrupt *regime*, it can very well be argued that it too was in the nature of “civil society against the state,” and hence, a variant of counterweight civil society. Somewhat bolstering this argument is the fact that civil society rose up against Marcos because he was a dictator *and* a crook.

Associational, counterweight and hegemonic civil society and the traditional concept of “mass movement” all contributed to EDSA II. Many members of the middle class were involved in organizations and groups of the associational civil society type. Despite the apolitical character of neo-Tocquevillean associational civil society, the middle class came out in full force in EDSA II. The middle class may even have comprised the majority at EDSA II, although the greater part of those in the mass protests all over the country leading up to EDSA II came from the lower classes.<sup>75</sup> Influenced by the traditional concept of “mass movement,” the CPP would certainly have wanted, if it could, to mobilize civil society to overthrow not just the Estrada regime but the entire “reactionary” political system. For some of the emergent left forces, however, EDSA II merely constituted a tactical shift of emphasis from hegemonic civil society to counterweight civil society.

After EDSA II, it was back to hegemonic civil society. Not much had really changed. EDSA II maintained the “elite democracy” that EDSA I had installed. The oligarchic elite had quickly come back to roost. According to Olle Törnquist, “middle class democratization” (featuring EDSA I and II) and the “idealist crafting of civil society democracy” in the Philippines had produced a superficial and unstable democracy.<sup>76</sup> Randy David remarked bluntly, “It is ... foolish for civil society to think it has any hold on the [Arroyo] administration it helped put

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<sup>74</sup> Reyes 2001, pp. 3, 10.

<sup>75</sup> Bautista 2001, pp. 7-9.

<sup>76</sup> Törnquist 2002, chapter 7.

in power. The political rules and structures are unchanged. This is still a government of the elite.”<sup>77</sup>

In May 2001, EDSA III, the revolt of the pro-Estrada masses, came as a quick and jolting reminder that Philippine civil society was still a very much divided lot and that the left had failed to reach large sections of the poor and marginalized. Most of the “great unwashed” who gathered at EDSA in support of Estrada and later attacked Malacañang Palace came from the poorest of the poor. EDSA III dramatically showed that given the long-standing role of patron-client ties in Philippine politics, large numbers of the masses remained vulnerable to clientelist and populist enticements.

### ***The Reassertion of Hegemonic Civil Society***

In a relatively short period, the emergent left parties and groups in the Philippines have made considerable progress in their engagement in civil society – in contentious politics as well as in development work. Due to the influences of associational and counterweight civil society, however, many activists and members of the new left forces have fallen for, as well as disseminated, some misconceptions about civil society. The most common is that civil society is innately good, almost like motherhood/fatherhood and apple pie. Another is that a strong and vibrant civil society ensures or strengthens democracy. A third is that POs and NGOs are at the very core or at the helm of civil society: Many POs and NGOs have become so enamored with “civil society” that they parade themselves as “civil society organizations” or present themselves as representing or even as *being* civil society. Anna Marie Karaos observes that in EDSA II, many activists kept using civil society to refer to anti-Estrada groups.<sup>78</sup> Such assertions have apparently brought results. “In the Philippine context,” writes Jose Magadia, “the civil society label focuses on two main types of voluntary societal organizations, the NGOs and the POs. This is the convention used and accepted by these organizations themselves, as well as the media, academe, church,

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<sup>77</sup> David 2002, p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> Karaos 2001, p. 5. Pro-Estrada forces, in turn, have been very critical of organizations and groups that they perceive as being pro-Arroyo. Late last year, a pro-Estrada newspaper referred to the latter as “the mob,” “the noisy rabble calling itself the civil society,” and “President Arroyo’s civil society” (*The Daily Tribune* 2003, p. 4). This shows, at least, that “civil society” is not always seen in a good light.

business, and government.”<sup>79</sup> The misconceptions are by no means prevalent only in the Philippines and they have been roundly criticized.<sup>80</sup>

At first glance, it would seem to be not such a bad idea for the emergent left forces and the POs/NGOs aligned with them to ride on the “good” image of civil society. There are deeper implications, however. Civil society, as Rodan rightly points out, is in fact “the locus of a range of inequalities based on class, gender, ethnicity, race and sexual preference.”<sup>81</sup> To view civil society in inequalitarian Philippines as “good” is to render oneself blind to the fact that like the state, civil society is dominated by the oligarchic elite. POs/NGOs may well be the most politicized, vocal and militant sector in Philippine civil society, but definitely not the most powerful. Temario Rivera puts POs/NGOs and the social movements in the list of the most politically significant actors in the Philippines’ “dense network of civil society organizations,” but the list also included “the highly influential Catholic church ... and various organizations allied with the church; the powerful business groups led by the Makati Business Club which includes the country’s top corporations and other business groupings such as the Bankers’ Association of the Philippines (BAP) and the Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP); the *Iglesia ni Kristo* (Church of Christ), a tightly organized and disciplined local church group with a track record of voting as a single bloc for their candidates of choice; the mass media, arguably the freest in the region; ... and charismatic religious movements.”<sup>82</sup> (According to Gretchen Casper, the Marcos regime, by forcing the Catholic church to play an active political role against it, inadvertently guaranteed that this social institution would continue to intervene in politics in the post-authoritarian era despite the constitutionally-mandated separation of the church and the state.<sup>83</sup>) Felipe Miranda includes politico-economic clans as being among the most powerful groups in civil society.<sup>84</sup> Rivera and Miranda forgot to mention criminal syndicates, which thrive in a “patrimonial oligarchic state” or “boss-democracy,” and, with their connections to *trapos* of Estrada’s ilk, certainly have political clout. Indeed, how can one account for the country’s 350,000 loose firearms<sup>85</sup> and eighteen murders per day<sup>86</sup> – “Bowling for Columbine,” Philippines?

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<sup>79</sup> Magadia 1999, p. 255.

<sup>80</sup> Carothers 1999b, pp. 18-22.

<sup>81</sup> Rodan 1996b, p. 22.

<sup>82</sup> Rivera 2002, p. 476.

<sup>83</sup> Casper 1995, pp. 3-4.

<sup>84</sup> Miranda 1991, pp. 161-3.

<sup>85</sup> Bengco 2003, p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> *Manila Times* 2003, p. 1.

“[M]ost of the ‘actually existing’ civil society,” remarks Törnquist, “reflects the combination of religiously backed liberalism, commercialism, and feudal-like bossism.”<sup>87</sup>

EDSA I and II overthrew dictatorial and corrupt regimes, but in place of these regimes, the “uprisings of civil society” could only go so far as to install an elite-dominated democracy or arguably a less corrupt regime. From the radical democratic perspective, the counter-hegemonic forces of the subordinate classes and communities were still too weak to wrest political, intellectual and moral leadership from the dominant forces and to build a new “national-popular collective will.” Philippine civil society, for as long as the oligarchic elite wields ideological and cultural hegemony in it, simply cannot be expected to transform an elite-dominated democracy to a more participatory and egalitarian one.

In its July 2003 congress, Akbayan forcefully reasserted the hegemonic civil society position:

Akbayan employs the strategy of combining a determined struggle for ideological and cultural hegemony, establishing building blocks through radical reforms and sustained organizing and constituency building in local communities, sub-classes and sectors and institutions ... A determined struggle for ideological and cultural hegemony involves a persistent campaign to critique the social and political order and espouse the alternative one, ensuring that such is the framework of tactical battles, developing the internal capacity for discourse and debate, and winning the battle of discourse in the cultural centers of society like the academe, the media, the churches, parliamentary debates and indigenous centers of local discourse.”<sup>88</sup>

Far from restricting their activities to civil society, the emergent left forces have ventured into the arena of the state or political society – elections and governance – and made initial, albeit very modest, gains. Akbayan, ABA-AKO, Abanse Pinay, AMIN, PM, and Sanlakas won seats in the lower house of Congress through the party-list system in the 1998, 2001 and/or 2004 elections. Akbayan and Sanlakas also scored some victories in village, municipal, city and provincial elections.

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<sup>87</sup> Törnquist 2002, p. 53.

<sup>88</sup> Akbayan National Congress 2003, p. 9.

As the Philippine experience has shown, associational and counterweight civil society are of limited usefulness and may even pose encumbrances to the deepening of democracy in post-authoritarian developing states. By presenting an idealized picture of a “good” civil society, they both gloss over or minimize the gross inequalities and the very real conflicts that exist in civil society. Since the “third wave” of democratization, a good number of developing countries have succeeded, over a decade or two, in constructing or reconstructing civil societies, some of which are already dense and vigorous. Hence, building or resurrecting civil society, as counterweight civil society emphasizes, may no longer be suitable as a main thrust in these third world democracies. Counterweight civil society may be relevant in certain instances of corrupt, even if democratically elected, regimes, but the argument for “people power” uprisings can hold only for extreme cases. In calling for the “strengthening” of civil society but ignoring the balance of power within a polity, associational civil society may serve to maintain or even fortify the rule of an entrenched politico-economic elite in highly inequalitarian and corruption-plagued countries. To get somewhere in building social trust and social capital (i.e., as Putnam defines it), perhaps one should first address social justice – and punitive justice for the rascals plundering government. Lastly, associational and counterweight civil society, by de-emphasizing political parties, may prevent subordinate classes and groups from availing of the institutional means to challenge the powerful parties of patronage and patrimonialism of the elite.

John Keane uses the term civil society as a somewhat neutral “ideal-typical category ... that both describes and envisages a complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected non-governmental institutions that tend to be non-violent, self-organizing, self-reflexive, and permanently in tension with each other and with the state institutions that ‘frame’, constrict and enable their activities.”<sup>89</sup> Perhaps, Philippine civil society may eventually move towards this normative definition. A definition, however, is different from an argument. Compared to associational and counterweight civil society, the hegemonic argument is more cogent. The gross social inequalities and high levels of corruption in the Philippines do justify a combative “counter-hegemonic” stance by those working for the consolidation and deepening of democracy and the rule of law.

In a good number of post-authoritarian developing states, hegemonic civil society may have greater relevance than associational and counterweight civil society. The former takes fully into account what the latter two gloss over,



e.g., the gross inequalities of wealth and power and the conflict within civil society, and the importance of political parties. The transformation of an “oligarchic” democracy into a more participatory and egalitarian one can be promoted not so much through the “strengthening” of civil society, but more through contestation within it.

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<sup>89</sup> Keane 1998, p. 6.

## *Chapter IV*

# **The Left, Elections and the Political Party System**

Since colonial times, members of the elite have dominated the Philippines' political party and electoral systems. The country's main political parties, representing factions of the elite, have been essentially non-ideological organizations that lack coherent political programs and mainly promote personal and factional political ambitions and goals.<sup>1</sup> They have weak membership bases and operate only during election time. Political turncoatism is a venerable tradition.<sup>2</sup> Post-Marcos parties, in particular, have reflected the inchoate<sup>3</sup> character of the Philippine political party system. Far from being stable, programmatic entities, they have in practice proven to be not much more than convenient vehicles of patronage that can be set up, merged with others, split, resurrected, regurgitated, reconstituted, renamed, repackaged, recycled or flushed down the toilet anytime. After over a century of playing and dominating the electoral game, the elite have so mastered its many tricks that they have turned it, to borrow from C.B. Atim, into a game of "perpetual musical chairs in which different bourgeois factions jostle for the right to mismanage the country and plunder its wealth".<sup>4</sup> As in pre-martial law times, post-1986 elections have focused on the candidates' personalities, rather than on issues or ideology, and they have been marred by the proverbial 3G's – "guns, goons and gold." At least

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<sup>1</sup> *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2004, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Miranda 1991, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> Mainwaring and Scully 1995, p. 22, cite the problems of an inchoate party system: "Democratic politics is more erratic, establishing legitimacy is more difficult, and governing is more complicated. Powerful economic elites tend to have privileged access to policy makers. In the absence of well-developed institutional checks and balances, patrimonial practices often prevail, and legislatures tend to be weakly developed."

<sup>4</sup> Atim 1989, p. 2.

147 people were killed in connection with the May 2004 national elections,<sup>5</sup> making them the bloodiest since 1986. Instead of having a well-developed political party system, notes Belinda A. Aquino, the Philippines seems to have retrogressed. “We have institutionalized the wrong things like vote buying, cheating, flying voters, the birds and the bees, fraud, gaudy entertainment, mudslinging, violence, intimidation, manipulation, tampering with ballot boxes, and other unsavory practices, which are played out with impunity.”<sup>6</sup>

According to Putzel, Philippine democracy remains weak and shallow because of the mismatch between formal political institutions (free elections, universal suffrage, free expression, etc.) and entrenched informal institutions of patronage politics that still govern behavior. Deepening democracy, he argued, entails going against the grain of traditional informal institutions and establishing political parties based on programmatic politics. With the fall of Marcos and the restoration of formal democratic institutions, some space has been created for new political actors to challenge the control of political clans and to engage in issue- and not personality-oriented politics.<sup>7</sup>

In fighting the oligarchic elite, the left has taken advantage of this political space. After mostly boycotting elections under Marcos, left parties and groups have participated in post-authoritarian electoral and parliamentary processes. With the entry of left parties advocating “new politics” into the electoral arena, there were bright hopes in some quarters, especially in the left’s support base, that the left would be able to bring the demands of the poor and the marginalized into the electoral and parliamentary processes and to break the stranglehold of elite parties on Philippine politics. There were expectations among some of those nauseated with *trapo* ways that the left parties would force the traditional parties to define their positions on issues more clearly, and thus foster a more issue-oriented politics. Perhaps the left would help bring about a change from an inchoate to an institutionalized political party system and contribute to the deepening of Philippine democracy. Unfortunately, however, the left has largely not been able to live up to such hopes and expectations.

In this chapter, I discuss the electoral challenge of the left – communists and the CPP-aligned NDs, as well as SDs and independent socialists – to the

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<sup>5</sup> Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2004, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Aquino 2004, p. 5. In mentioning “the birds and the bees,” Aquino refers to the classic imagery in Philippine politics of birds and bees having the ability to vote.

<sup>7</sup> Putzel 1999, pp. 198-223.

*trapos* and the traditional parties.<sup>8</sup> I argue that the left has not yet made much progress in breaking *trapo* domination over the post-Marcos political party and electoral systems not so much because of a long-held aversion to electoral politics, as some scholars contend, but more because a sizeable part of the left still holds an instrumental view of democratic processes and institutions. I show, however, that some emergent left parties 1) have adopted or are moving towards an integral view of democracy, 2) have made a vital breakthrough in the congressional party-list vote and 3) are now more methodically entering other electoral contests, particularly at the barangay and municipal levels.

Helpful for analyzing shifting views about elections of the Philippine left are distinctions Kenneth Roberts made in his study of the left in Latin America regarding the responses of left groups to formal democratic institutions and processes, which ranged from 1) outright rejection or boycott of such processes; 2) an instrumental view of democracy; and 3) an integral conception of democracy (see pp. 75-6). By no means is the view or orientation on democracy of the Philippine left the sole or the overarching reason for its dismal electoral performance. Structural and relational (e.g., left-state, left-civil society, state-elite, intra-left, etc.) factors certainly need to be taken into account, and I bring these in in the course of my discussion. The left's view of democracy and democratic institutions and processes, however, plays a crucial role, as it determines to a large extent how the left approaches or confronts these structural and relational factors.

### ***The Left and Elections before EDSA I***

Elections have long been one of the weakest spots of the Philippine left. This is so not only because the elite have always seen to it that there is no level playing field, but also because for a certain period, a large section of the left chose to boycott these "bourgeois" exercises and to fight in other arenas. According to Randolph David, one of the main reasons why the left has never won power in the Philippines is "[t]he deeply entrenched tradition of refusal by progressive elements to engage in electoral struggles."<sup>9</sup> A review of the left's involvement in elections, however, reveals that the left-wing aversion to electoral politics is not as deep as often portrayed. This "tradition" actually dates back only to 1968 with the founding of the Maoist CPP. Most members of the CPP during the Marcos

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<sup>8</sup> In this chapter, I do not delve much into the May 2004 elections as I did my fieldwork before 2004.

period favored boycotting elections, but other left groups, particularly the SDs, often opposed these boycotts. And there were times in the pre-1986 period when the CPP itself or sections of it seriously considered, or even engaged in, electoral politics.

The early left parties like the PKP and the SPP in the American colonial period participated in elections. From its very founding in 1930, the PKP, precursor of the CPP, declared its intention to participate in elections “under its own banner.” In 1931 the PKP presented its own candidates for political office, including PKP leader Crisanto Evangelista, who ran for the Senate. Government authorities, however, refused to give the PKP rally permits and dispersed rallies when it persisted. The illegalization of the party and imprisonment of its leaders in October 1932 precluded participation in the next few elections.<sup>10</sup> In 1934, SPP chairman Pedro Abad Santos, a former two-term assemblyman, ran unsuccessfully for the governorship of Pampanga. The Republican Party, the SPP, and the Toilers League (a legal front for the outlawed PKP) formed the Coalition of the Oppressed Masses and backed the candidacy of Republican Gregorio Aglipay for president and communist Norberto Nabong for vice-president in the 1935 elections.<sup>11</sup> Aglipay and Nabong were routed. The Popular Front, which included the PKP and the SPP, fielded candidates in the local elections of 1937 and 1940 and in the Philippine Assembly elections of 1938. In 1937, the SPP won the mayorship in the provincial capital and another major town of Pampanga, and a majority in eight municipal councils.<sup>12</sup> SPP leader Abad Santos lost again in the Pampanga gubernatorial race, but he nearly tripled the votes he got in 1934. In 1940, the Popular Front increased the number of its winning mayoral bets in Pampanga to nine and it also won all the council seats in three of the province’s biggest municipalities. One of its candidates for provincial board member also made it. Abad Santos failed a third time in his gubernatorial attempt, but this time by a close margin. Apart from its gains in Pampanga, the Popular Front also won the mayoralty or councilorships in four towns in Tarlac and one town in Nueva Ecija.<sup>13</sup> The Front also put up candidates for various national positions in the 1941 elections. Evangelista, the chairman of the merged PKP-SPP, headed the roster of senatorial candidates. Vice-chairman Abad Santos

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<sup>9</sup> David 1997, pp. 144-5.

<sup>10</sup> Hoeksema 1956, pp. 88, 102, 125. The Court of First Instance of Manila actually declared the PKP illegal and sentenced its leaders in September 1931, but the PKP appealed. The Supreme Court upheld the decision in October 1932.

<sup>11</sup> Allen 1985, pp. 14-15, 88; Pomeroy 1992, p. 91.

<sup>12</sup> Tan 1984, p. 34.

<sup>13</sup> Kerkvliet 1972, p. 142; Constantino 1975, p. 382.

filed his candidacy for no less than the country's presidency, but withdrew a few weeks before the elections after the Front was denied the right to more election inspectors.<sup>14</sup>

Participation in electoral politics immediately resumed after the Japanese occupation. In the first postwar election in April 1946, the leftist Democratic Alliance whose top leaders consisted of progressive intellectuals as well as PKP cadres, forged a coalition with President Osmeña's Nacionalista Party (NP). The NP-DA coalition lost, but all of the seven DA candidates in Central Luzon for the House of Representatives won convincingly. Upon the convening of Congress, however, the Liberal Party-dominated body unseated six of the seven, alleging that they resorted to fraud and terrorism during the polls. The situation in Central Luzon, a hotbed of agrarian unrest since the 1920s, further deteriorated. Nonetheless, the PKP did not boycott elections. In 1949, it extended "critical support" to Jose P. Laurel's presidential bid.<sup>15</sup> Only in 1951, at the height of the Huk rebellion did the PKP actively boycott elections, but it soon regarded this as an error.<sup>16</sup> The PKP did not participate in subsequent elections, not because it opposed them, but simply because the party had become too debilitated to make any impact.

When the Maoist CPP was established in 1968, it condemned the PKP for abandoning the armed struggle and pursuing a purely parliamentary line. Elections were taboo. CPP founding chairman Sison castigated the PKP leadership for falling into "the counterrevolutionary practice of directly participating in the puppet elections."<sup>17</sup> "To have a few seats in a reactionary parliament, and to have no [revolutionary] army in our country is to play a fool's game," he wrote further.<sup>18</sup> Party members were constantly reminded of events in the country's history ostensibly pointing to the bankruptcy of the electoral or parliamentary road, e.g., the PKP's illegalization in 1931, the DA experience, etc. The tragic experiences of the "revolutionary" forces in Indonesia in Sukarno's time and Chile in Allende's time were also often cited to demonstrate the folly of the purely electoral or parliamentary path.

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<sup>14</sup> Hoeksema 1956, pp. 178, 221-2; Tan 1985, pp. 36-7.

<sup>15</sup> Saulo 1990, pp. 36-43; Lava 2002, pp. 94, 102. Alejo Santos was the only DA congressman-elect who managed to retain his seat. Unlike the other DA congressmen-elect, Santos had run under both the NP and the DA.

<sup>16</sup> Lava 2002, p. 163. According to Harold Crouch, the PKP's boycott coincided with a similar "hardening" among other Asian communist parties and may have been influenced by the latter (Emailed comment from Crouch, 6 July 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Guerrero 1979a, p. 37.

<sup>18</sup> Guerrero 1979b, p. 181.

In the main, the CPP and ND forces boycotted elections from 1969 to 1986. Before martial law, the CPP did not always engage in a campaign of “hard” boycott. In the 1971 elections for delegates to the Constitutional Convention, the official CPP/ND line was boycott, but legal ND forces in the national capital region were directed to campaign actively for a leftist candidate, Enrique Voltaire Garcia III, who won, nearly topping the Metro Manila vote. After the Plaza Miranda bombing of 1971, the CPP toned down its call for a boycott of the senatorial elections so as to allow for a landslide win for the legal opposition and hasten Marcos’ political isolation. After Marcos imposed martial rule, however, the CPP boycott line turned “hard.” Participating in Marcos’ electoral shows was thought to be tantamount to legitimizing his dictatorial regime. In the 1978 elections for Marcos’ transition parliament, the IBP, however, NDs in Manila-Rizal decided to participate in the elections, linking up with “bourgeois” anti-Marcos forces and the SDs, and putting up a coalition opposition ticket with them. The cadres of the national capital region hoped to take advantage of the “democratic space” opened up by the elections to develop the mass movement into a “revolutionary upsurge.”<sup>19</sup> Afterwards, however, the national CPP leadership roundly criticized the leading CPP cadres in Manila-Rizal for engaging in “reformism” and removed them from their posts for violating the party’s boycott policy. In subsequent election boycotts in 1980-84, there was not much questioning about, nor any significant violation of, the boycott policy. “*Rebolusyon, hindi eleksyon!*” (Revolution, not election!) virtually became an all-weather slogan. Party leaders, however, made some exceptions during the 1982 barangay elections. In many guerrilla zones, NPA fighters and ND cadres and activists were directed to secretly put up or endorse ND or allied candidates for the barangay councils to prevent these councils from being mobilized by the government for counter-insurgency purposes. The NDs also fielded or endorsed candidates in some major urban centers to wage anti-dictatorship propaganda and to help project some legal mass leaders.<sup>20</sup> When the anti-dictatorship movement registered a mighty upsurge after the Aquino assassination in 1983, party leaders mulled the idea of participating in the national electoral arena at some future period, and even of establishing an electoral party. For the 1984 Batasang Pambansa elections, however, the position remained boycott. In preparation for possible participation of the NDs in forthcoming polls, Bayan, the multisectoral coalition of ND organizations and groups, created an electoral

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<sup>19</sup> Executive Committee, Manila-Rizal Committee, CPP 1977, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Ricardo Reyes, 3 November 2003, Quezon City.

struggles commission upon establishment in 1985. Electoral participation, nonetheless, continued to be viewed with relatively low regard. Sison, then in prison, wrote: “[T]he electoral struggle is inferior and merely supplementary to other forms of political struggle. To revolutionaries, it runs fourth to armed struggle, people’s strikes and other mass action.”<sup>21</sup>

The SDs had less objection to participating in elections during martial law. They viewed the polls as a means to weaken the Marcos dictatorship. In the 1978 IBP elections, they went all out. With only eighty cadres, PDSP wrested control of the Laban electoral machinery from the NDs and managed to mobilize 7,400 poll watchers.<sup>22</sup> In subsequent elections, however, PDSP was not able to play as prominent a role due to divisions within SD ranks. Some SDs in Mindanao helped organize the reform-oriented PDP in 1982, which merged with Laban the next year. In 1984, PDP-Laban won several Batasan seats and a good number of local government posts, especially in Mindanao. By then, however, there were already marked tensions between Laban’s old pros with their traditional politics, and young and idealistic PDP stalwarts with their “politics of principles.”<sup>23</sup> PDP soon became just another traditional party.

Bowing to strong domestic and international pressure, Marcos called for a “snap” presidential election in November 1985, to be held in February 1986. Not realizing that the anti-dictatorship struggle was coming to a head, the CPP once again adopted a boycott stance even as the other anti-dictatorship forces rallied behind the candidacy of Senator Aquino’s widow, Corazon Aquino, who ran under PDP-Laban. The election, the CPP leadership said, would merely be “a noisy and empty political battle” between factions of the ruling classes; it would be rigged by the “US-Marcos dictatorship” and it would be “meaningless to the broad masses of our people.”<sup>24</sup> As expected, Marcos tried to steal the election, but Filipinos, fed up with dictatorial rule, protested in huge numbers. Less than three weeks after the polls, “people power” deposed Marcos and swept Corazon Aquino to power. The boycott fiasco forced the CPP leaders to admit that they had made a “major tactical blunder” and that as a result of the boycott, “we lost a lot of our political leverage, impaired our political image built up over the years, and forfeited our leadership of the people when they decisively moved to end the Marcos fascist dictatorship.” The CPP Politburo further acknowledged:

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<sup>21</sup> Sison 1985, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Hofileña 2002a, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Gutierrez 1994b, pp. 99-100.

<sup>24</sup> Executive Committee of the Central Committee, CPP 1985.



As practice has now shown, the snap election and the major events it unleashed constituted the climax of the people's long-drawn struggle against the Marcos fascist dictatorship. During and after the snap election, the historically determined central political struggle was the showdown over the very existence and continuance of fascist rule. The snap election became the main channel for the large-scale mobilization and deployment of the masses for the decisive battle to overthrow the fascist dictatorship.<sup>25</sup>

### ***The Partido ng Bayan Experience***

Still smarting from the boycott fiasco of February 1986, the NDs set up *Partido ng Bayan* (PnB) six months after. Sison, newly released from detention, chaired PnB's preparatory committee and founding congress. In early 1987, the NDs established a women's party, *Kababaihan para sa Inang Bayan* (Kaiba) or Women for the Mother Country. PnB, Kaiba, Bayan and several other organizations established the Alliance for New Politics. Advocating "new politics," PnB fielded candidates for both houses of Congress in the 1987 polls. The neophytes expected to win two or three seats in the Senate and around 20 per cent of the seats in the House of Representatives,<sup>26</sup> but all of its senatorial candidates lost and only two of its congressional hopefuls were elected. The PnB cited the following factors for its loss: 1) Various institutions of the state and the ruling system had connived to make traditional parties and politicians win. 2) The majority of the population was still influenced by traditional politics and the reactionary system – the masses turned out to be susceptible to vote-buying, and the middle forces, to "reformism." 3) The PnB's network was beset by internal problems (e.g., lack of accurate data on PnB's mass base, and too many mass campaigns on various issues getting in the way of the electoral campaign) and unresolved questions (e.g., how to view the Aquino government, the place of electoral struggle in the overall struggle, and whether the PnB was participating in elections to win or simply to wage propaganda). PnB fielded candidates in the 1988 local elections, but the fire was gone. Soon after, it ceased to have a national center and became dormant.<sup>27</sup> Kaiba, which won only one congressional seat in the 1987 elections, suffered the same fate. PnB's two congressmen, as well as Kaiba's congresswoman, eventually joined traditional parties.

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<sup>25</sup> Politburo 1986, pp. 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> *Partido ng Bayan* 1993, p. 4.

With PnB's and Kaiba's entry into the electoral arena, it seemed that the NDs had finally overcome their aversion to electoral politics. But their inactivity after the 1988 polls led many to wonder if the NDs were not that serious after all. Was a distaste for electoral politics too ingrained? Not exactly. Even after the 1987 PnB debacle, the NDs continued to field or at least endorse candidates. They no longer equated the boycott of elections with being revolutionary or electoral participation with being reformist. The NDs still believed that only a revolution could bring about genuine political and social change in the Philippines and that only those who upheld the primacy of armed struggle could be considered genuine revolutionaries, but they approved of participating in elections and taking seats in Congress as long as these were subordinate to, and in support of, the armed struggle. Assessing the 1987 polls, a CPP Politburo member declared: "The Party viewed the elections as a major but secondary arena of struggle. The tasks in the armed struggle and in the mass movements occupy a higher place in our priorities."<sup>28</sup>

With PnB and Kaiba, the NDs shifted from outright rejection of "bourgeois" democratic institutions and processes to what Roberts termed as "an instrumental view of democracy" and not "an integral conception of democracy." Elections had become a useful tool in the CPP's program to overthrow the "reactionary" Philippine state. Sison, who in the early 1970s had lambasted PKP's participation in "bourgeois" elections as "counterrevolutionary," now sang a somewhat different tune. "Even if by fraud and terrorism the reactionaries deprive Partido ng Bayan of electoral victory," remarked Sison, "the party still serves a good purpose by exposing such fraud and terrorism, by taking advantage of splits among the reactionaries, by promoting the national democratic line, and, of course, by winning seats that can be won."<sup>29</sup> To the PnB, participating in the "reactionary" elections was but a means to do away with them: "The people will continue to participate in reactionary elections for as long as their time in politics is not yet up, for as long as the people have not yet realized through their own experience that these elections are rotten and bankrupt, and that there are more effective means for change they can pin their hopes on."<sup>30</sup>

Upon Sison's intercession, the PnB was reestablished in mid-1991, and it participated in elections the following year. After its poor showing in 1987-88 and subsequent inactivity, however, PnB had acquired a loser's image. Worse,

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<sup>27</sup> *Partido ng Bayan* 1993, pp. 4-19, 30.

<sup>28</sup> Editorial Staff, *Ang Bayan* 1988, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Sison 1989, pp. 168-9.

<sup>30</sup> *Partido ng Bayan* 1993, p. 13. (Translated from Filipino.)

according to one observer, the NDs were actually split three ways on the elections: “*Rebolusyon, hindi eleksyon!*”, participation as a tool for propaganda and education, and “all-out” participation.<sup>31</sup> When PnB endorsed – somewhat belatedly – the presidential bid of Senator Jovito Salonga (Liberal Party) in 1992, the candidate himself did not acknowledge PnB’s support and his campaigners refused to work with PnB activists. Of seven presidential candidates, Salonga landed sixth, winning fewer votes than Imelda Marcos. Two senatorial, four congressional and 622 local candidates endorsed by PnB won.<sup>32</sup> The overwhelming majority of them, including some NDs, however, had run under the banners of traditional parties. “Hardly anyone wanted to run under PnB – it was the kiss of death,” declared Loretta Ann “Etta” Rosales, PnB president in 1991-2 and Akbayan congressperson since 1998. “PnB should not have been revived. After the elections, we buried it very gently.”<sup>33</sup> Despite PnB’s demise, the NDs still found it useful to participate in elections, but their instrumental approach towards elections became increasingly cynical. Throughout the 1990s, the NDs, apart from supporting the candidacies of certain allies, used elections for “fund-raising” – collecting “contributions” and “permit-to-campaign” fees from various candidates, especially those campaigning in NPA guerrilla zones.<sup>34</sup>

Prior to the big debate and split in the CPP in 1992-3, voices within the broad left and within the ND ranks had called upon the revolutionary movement to change its outlook over elections. In the light of dramatic domestic and international changes, particularly the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship and the collapse of Soviet socialism, Bisig member Rene Ciria-Cruz, for instance, entreated the CPP to work for a negotiated settlement with the government and to take the parliamentary road.<sup>35</sup> University of the Philippines professor Temario Rivera urged the NDF to engage seriously in legal electoral politics for three reasons: 1) the restoration of the electoral process made active support for armed struggle more difficult; 2) the poor prospect of receiving external material support for the armed struggle necessitated developing a much broader base; and 3) to democratize its political practice and flesh out a system of accountability, the movement had to practice a form of representative democracy.<sup>36</sup> Bayan official J.V. Bautista (who later became a Sanlakas congressperson) complained of the left’s “ideological ambiguity” over elections, which stymied its ability to

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<sup>31</sup> Gershman 1992, p. 5

<sup>32</sup> *Partido ng Bayan* 1993, pp. 37, 42.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Etta Rosales, 12 January 2003, in Quezon City.

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, Cala 1995, p. 3; and Mogato 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Ciria-Cruz 1992, pp. 10-12.

unite behind a common strategy.<sup>37</sup> Others attempted to go a bit deeper into ideological or strategic questions. Drawing from Gramsci, Eric Gutierrez, a member of the Volunteers for Popular Democracy, urged fellow NDs to view elections not merely as a process for the reproduction of the dominant classes and their form of rule, but as “‘sites of struggle,’ which the Left must wrest from the dominant classes in the process of countering their hegemony.”<sup>38</sup>

Walden Bello, then a U.S.-based ex-ND and one of the main organizers of the FOPA, advocated that the left take electoral struggle as one of the central arenas of change. Bello cited political culture as an important factor: “[O]ne major failing of the Philippine progressive movement has been its underestimation of popular political culture and how much elections play in this, how people see elections as the only form or source of political legitimacy. And unless you are tried and tested in the electoral battle, you’re not accorded legitimacy.” Unlike the other electoral advocates, Bello’s stance shifted from the instrumental to the integral view of democracy, the third response in Roberts’ typology:

To automatically approach the elections as an outside political force and condemn the whole thing or to just have very tactical approaches to elections and to formal democratic processes, I think, will condemn us to be forever marginal in this culture ... In our studies of democracy, power and transformation, rather than conceive of an unbridgeable gulf between formal democracy and substantive democracy, we would like to see how substantive democracy can be pushed within the tradition of formal and elite democracy so that there is a continuation in some way, as well as having some elements of a break.<sup>39</sup>

The CPP debate and split between the “reaffirmists” and the “rejectionists” afforded many leftists the occasion to reexamine their views on electoral and parliamentary struggle. In the course of repudiating Maoism, particularly the Maoist tenet of the primacy of armed struggle over all other forms of struggle, the “rejectionists” developed a greater appreciation for the various forms of political struggle, including the electoral struggle. The mass

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<sup>36</sup> Rivera 1992, p. 50.

<sup>37</sup> Gershman 1992, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Gutierrez 1994b, p. 105.

<sup>39</sup> Bello 1992, p. 5.

movement and electoral struggle ceased to be seen as being merely in the service of the armed struggle. In castigating Stalinism, particularly Stalinist one-party dictatorship, the “rejectionists” embraced political pluralism and truly competitive elections. In the 1993 FOPA conference, representatives of the “rejectionists,” Bisig and other left groups put together a new vision and program for the Philippines, which highlighted the role of the electoral struggle in the left’s overall strategy: “The [progressive] movement must be able to contend in different political arenas, but especially under a regime of elite democracy, in the electoral struggle, which is, whether we like it or not, the current source of legitimacy on who governs. This ability to compete electorally must include evolving an organization that can compete with the political parties of the elite in terms of electoral mobilization and mass outreach.”<sup>40</sup>

### ***Twists and Turns in the Evolution of a New Electoral Formation***

The evolutionary process of coming up with a formation of the left that could compete with the parties of the elite had actually already begun earlier. A few years before the CPP split, there were already some groups and individuals within as well as outside the ND and SD ranks who wanted to take the electoral struggle more seriously. They refused to toe the official lines and electoral strategies of the CPP and PDSP. The “popdems” had become increasingly frustrated with the CPP’s doctrinairism; Pandayan, with the PDP-Laban’s becoming a *trapo*-dominated party and with PDSP’s growing tendency to “compromise” with the government and the *trapos* in the ruling coalition. The popdems, Pandayan and BISIG worked together to rejuvenate the left’s electoral challenge. In 1990, they launched “Project 1992” in an effort to build a national “center-left” coalition for the 1992 national elections. After months of “shuttle diplomacy” with various left groups, however, the project fell through as the “three little pigs” – as some NDs disparagingly called them – failed to draw in the mainstream NDs and the other SD formations. Unfazed, the threesome poured their energies into “Project 2001,” billed as “an electoral movement of the NGO community.” Involved in the project were various PO and NGO alliances from all over the country, including the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO), the largest coalition of NGOs.<sup>41</sup> Former Congressman Florencio Abad, one of Project 2001’s main initiators, called on the PO-NGO community to intervene

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<sup>40</sup> Bello 1993, p. 21.

<sup>41</sup> Gutierrez 1994b, pp. 107-10.

in the electoral process in four ways: raising political consciousness, lobbying for electoral reforms, developing a people's platform, and giving actual support to specific candidates.<sup>42</sup> Through 1991, the POs and NGOs worked closely together on the first three. CODE-NGO balked on the fourth point, however. To avoid a split, Project 2001 refrained from endorsing candidates. Frustrated once again, the popdems, Pandayan and Bisig formed themselves into a loose, non-party formation, *Kaakbay ng Sambayanan* (Akbayan) or Ally of the People. Akbayan adopted the development agenda of the POs/NGOs in Project 2001 and endorsed the LP-PDP slate headed by Salonga and his running mate Aquilino Pimentel, Jr., becoming the third member of the national coalition.<sup>43</sup> By then, however, the election campaign was about to begin. Akbayan fared as badly as PnB – both had endorsed mostly the same candidates. The loss of the Salonga-Pimentel ticket, however, was particularly hard on Akbayan as it had been part of the LP-PDP coalition. PnB crowed that Akbayan had been reduced to being a mere “support appendage” with no say in crucial decision-making in the LP-PDP coalition and that the “broadly-based NGO electoral movement” Akbayan counted on had failed to deliver.<sup>44</sup>

By the time of the 1995 congressional and local elections, the CPP had already split and the “rejectionists” mainly gravitated towards two multisectoral alliances, Sanlakas and Siglaya. Both alliances supported “progressive” candidates running under traditional parties or as independents. So did the three groups that had gathered under Akbayan in 1992 – Bisig, the “popdems” and Pandayan. Some of the candidates endorsed by the emergent left groups did win, but their victories were due to a combination of factors, not simply the progressive vote. Sanlakas performed creditably in Metro Manila, where five out of seven congressional candidates and a good number of local candidates it backed made it. Bisig did fairly well in several local contests, especially in General Santos City where the mayoral candidate it endorsed pulled through.<sup>45</sup> In a number of cases, the new left groups backed rival candidates. In Pasig, this proved disastrous: a traditional politician edged out two leftist congressional candidates, one supported by Sanlakas, the other by Siglaya.

Those within the left who had been thinking of setting up a new electoral party did not do so before the 1992 and 1995 elections because they doubted that a new party would have a winning chance. Participating in elections without

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<sup>42</sup> Abad 1991.

<sup>43</sup> Rood 1991, p. 110-1.

<sup>44</sup> *Partido ng Bayan* 1993, p. 52.

<sup>45</sup> Cala 1995, p. 3.

one's own party, however, had grown most wearisome. A PO-NGO coalition like "Project 2001" could not be expected to endorse candidates. A nonparty formation in an electoral coalition with *trapo* parties (e.g., LP-PDP) ended up becoming a mere appendage of the latter. Many of the left-endorsed winning "progressives" who ran under *trapo* parties or as independents in 1992 and 1995 moved away from the popular movements upon assuming office and soon imbibed – or laid bare – the thinking and ways of patronage politics. The new left forces saw an opening when Congress passed the Party-List System Act in early 1995. The Act, which President Ramos promptly signed into law, provided that 20 percent of the House of Representatives be reserved for representatives of labor, peasant, urban poor, indigenous peoples, women and other marginalized sectors elected through a party-list system. The emergent left forces believed that the left parties would have good chances of winning since the new law barred the five biggest parties from participating in the first party-list vote.<sup>46</sup> Wurfel, among other scholars, lauded the party-list system as a "major innovation," as being "an essential asset for reforming the fundamental character of the Philippine political system." However, he saw some deficiencies in the law itself and many difficulties in its implementation.<sup>47</sup>

The emergent left groups saw the party-list system, despite all its deficiencies, as an excellent political opportunity. Thus, for the first party-list vote (held as part of the general elections of 1998), they organized or refashioned themselves into electoral parties or "sectoral organizations" and tossed their hats in the ring.<sup>48</sup> Many ex-cadres and ex-activists of ND, SD and other left backgrounds became politically active again. PDSP was the only left party of long standing to sign up for the party-list elections. The tripartite Akbayan revived itself, this time as a political party and with a fourth "little pig," Siglaya. Some popdems and Pandayan members, however, did not join the new party. Sanlakas registered for the party-list vote as a sectoral organization. The NDs

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<sup>46</sup> A Supreme Court ruling on 26 June 2001 barred them completely from the party-list system.

<sup>47</sup> Wurfel 1997, pp. 19-30. According to Wurfel, the law made a pointless and confusing distinction between sectors and parties and it contained loopholes making it possible for *trapo* dummies to sneak in as parties of marginalized sectors. With only several months to go before the first party-list vote, few voters knew about the system or understood how it worked. In addition to failing to conduct a good information drive about the party-list system, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) also did not come up with a reasonably tamper-proof counting system.

<sup>48</sup> Prior to 1997, the emergent left groups were only pre-party formations or multisectoral alliances that were not formally registered with the Comelec as electoral parties or groups. PDSP was already registered with the Comelec as an electoral party as early as 1987.

(“reaffirmists”) did not participate in the first party-list vote due to the inability to achieve unity on whether to field candidates or not.<sup>49</sup> Thanks to the party-list system, the emergent left groups scored a double breakthrough. They finally managed to build new electoral formations distinct from those of the *trapos* – and with no strings attached to the CPP. Moreover, amid the voters’ great confusion as to what the party-list system was all about, some of the new formations registered their first, albeit modest, wins: ABA, AKO, Abanse Pinay, Akbayan and Sanlakas each won a seat in the House of Representatives.

### ***Instrumental versus Integral View of Democracy; Revolutionary versus Reformist Politics***

As the 2001 congressional and local elections neared, left parties and groups vigorously prepared to compete once again in the party-list vote. Each of the incumbents hoped to garner the maximum number of seats that a party could get in the party-list system: three. As a way around this three-seat limit, Sanlakas, upon the prodding of the newly-established Marxist-Leninist PMP, decided to divide into two: Sanlakas and a new electoral party, the Workers’ Party (PM). The left parties that lost in 1998 like PDSP, Pinatubo, AMIN, and Abanse Bisaya (renamed Atin) got ready to try again. Bandila, the SD multisectoral alliance in the mid-80s, resurrected itself for the party-list vote. New groups with many ex-NDs – e.g., Asakapil and Alternative Action – surfaced. The Commission on Elections (Comelec) adjudged the poor, old Democratic Alliance a nuisance and disqualified it. What would later turn out to be the most significant development in the left’s participation in the 2001 elections, however, was the emergence of Bayan Muna, the electoral party that the NDs established in September 1999 to replace PnB.<sup>50</sup> In the midst of the preparations for the 2001 elections came the “*jueteng* scandal,” in which then President Estrada was accused as having gotten “kickbacks” from the illegal numbers game, *jueteng*. Virtually all of the left groups participated in the campaign for Estrada’s ouster and, unlike in People Power I, were in the thick of People Power II. Seven left parties managed to translate their mobilization capabilities into post-EDSA II electoral victories, but most of their

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Congressman Satur Ocampo, 11 January 2003, in Quezon City.

<sup>50</sup> Bayan Muna acknowledges “ideological affinity” with the CPP-NPA, but does not categorically admit an organizational link. See Go 2002, p. 14.



representatives had to wait a long time before they could be proclaimed.<sup>51</sup> The neophyte Bayan Muna topped the party-list race and garnered the maximum three seats. Akbayan increased its seats to two, but got its second seat only after one and a half years. AMIN, ABA,<sup>52</sup> PM, Sanlakas and Abanse Pinay finally secured one seat each, but their representatives were installed less than a year before the end of their 3-year term.

Bayan Muna marked a more determined contestation by the NDs in the electoral field. Instead of entering the contests in both houses of Congress as PnB did in 1987, the ND electoral party focused on the lower house, and only on the party-list polls. Bayan Muna, however, did not constitute a departure from the NDs' post-EDSA I instrumental attitude towards "bourgeois" democratic institutions and processes. As early as December 2000, before Estrada had fallen, the CPP leadership had instructed its leading party committees in a memo on the May 2001 elections "to bring down the US-Estrada regime and comprehensively advance the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and antifascist struggle." The CPP memo listed four additional tasks: 1) to build up further the momentum of protest actions and mass struggles; 2) to intensify the revolutionary armed struggle; 3) to forge close ties with legal progressive forces; and 4) to expose the "reactionary character" of the elections.<sup>53</sup>

The NDs have attributed Bayan Muna's success mainly to their grassroots machinery, their high-profile role in People Power II and their skillful alliance work. Bayan Muna's president, Congressman Satur Ocampo, remarked, "One factor that made it easier for Bayan Muna to carry out its campaign, as compared to *Partido ng Bayan* in 1987, was the fact that EDSA II intervened. Bayan Muna had been able to take a leading, a very significant participation in that process, which resulted in a situation where Bayan Muna, though not formally, was regarded as an ally of the [Arroyo-led] People Power Coalition [PPC]." Bayan Muna negotiated with twelve of PPC's thirteen senatorial candidates, getting their endorsement for Bayan Muna in the party-list vote in exchange for Bayan Muna's support for their senatorial bids. The allied candidates provided Bayan Muna with campaign materials, sample ballots, and other forms of support.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Comelec reviewed the long roster of party-list groups, deciding which were qualified or not qualified, only *after* and not before the elections. Only five party-list representatives were immediately proclaimed. The fifteen others were sworn in, in several batches, only after prolonged legal tussles.

<sup>52</sup> ABA coalesced with AKO to form the ABA-AKO Coalition in July 2003.

<sup>53</sup> Executive Committee of the Central Committee, CPP 2000, pp. 2-4. (*Translated from Filipino.*)

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Ocampo.

Ostensibly to keep some distance from *trapos*, Bayan Muna refrained from campaigning on the same stage as the PPC senatorial candidates. At the PPC's *miting de avance* (final campaign rally), however, Ocampo himself showed up and was one of the speakers. In that single symbolic event, the PPC-Bayan Muna alliance, never officially declared, was made plain for everyone to see.<sup>55</sup> Having to campaign for mostly *trapo* senatorial bets was compromise enough. But at the local and district levels, Bayan Muna struck deals with *trapos* of all stripes – pro-Arroyo, pro-Estrada, “independents” – sometimes even with rivals for the same position. One scribe commented that Bayan Muna topped the party-list vote by riding on the machinery of the traditional politicians it allied itself with.<sup>56</sup>

Even as Bayan Muna solicited support in cash or kind from *trapos* and other sources, the CPP-NPA collected “permit to campaign” (PTC) fees more extensively from politicians wanting to campaign in “red areas.” The CPP's December 2000 memo had explicitly stated: “Expand the implementation of the PTC. The PTC contains a tactical alliance part as well as a part for asserting revolutionary political power.”<sup>57</sup> The PTC fees ranged from P50,000 or two M-16 rifles for mayoral candidates in small towns to P500,000 to P1 million for senatorial candidates. The CPP-NPA is said to have raised P50 million from local candidates in the 2001 elections.<sup>58</sup> Other left parties, e.g., PDSP, Akbayan and Sanlakas, complained that in many places, NPA guerrillas, while actively campaigning for Bayan Muna, harassed their members and campaigners. An ex-ND aide of a traditional politician commented that the NDs had given the 3G's a new meaning: “guns, guerrillas and gold.”<sup>59</sup>

Some of the emergent left parties and groups – e.g., Akbayan, ABA and Abanse Pinay – have from the start taken an integral view of democracy. They hold that formal democracy is valuable in its own right, to paraphrase Huber et al., because “it makes deepening towards more fully participatory democracy and progress towards increasing equality possible.”<sup>60</sup> Even while Akbayan was still

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<sup>55</sup> It is sometimes argued that traditional politicians woo leftists to give the impression that they too are issue-oriented, principled or progressive, or enjoy the support of those who are. Patricio N. Abinales contends, however, that politicians in the Philippines now practice “big tent” politics – forging coalitions that bring together ideologically-opposed groups for tactical purposes, such as the election of a presidential candidate. See Abinales 2001, pp. 154-61. In this case, PPC needed support in the senatorial race, which was a tight contest. Arroyo's support for Bayan Muna was probably also a “confidence-building measure” for government-NDF talks, which were reopened two weeks before the elections.

<sup>56</sup> Go 2002, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> Executive Committee of the Central Committee, p. 3. (*Translated from Filipino.*)

<sup>58</sup> Mogato 2003, pp. 20-1.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Ka Dencio, March 22, 2002, in Makati.

<sup>60</sup> Huber et al. 1997, p. 323.

being formed, it already came up with a clear-cut position recognizing the Philippines' democratic institutions and processes while at the same time expressing its desire to transform formal democracy into a more participatory and egalitarian one. As Joel Rocamora, Akbayan president in 2001-3, stated, early on: "The party will operate within existing constitutional processes while seeking to change them to make them more democratic. The contradiction between the form and substance of elite rule, between political democracy and social disparity presents a substantial opportunity for a political party that will engage in mainstream political processes to advance a redistributive agenda."<sup>61</sup> In its political platform, Akbayan declared: "We believe that the restoration of constitutional democracy in 1986 was an important achievement of the anti-dictatorship movement. The reestablishment of the institutions of democracy during the Aquino presidency consolidated this historic step ... But formal democracy is not enough. We cannot have political democracy for long with an undemocratic economic system ... Asset reform is not just a matter of social justice or laying down a domestic market base for sustained economic growth, it is also imperative for deepening democracy." And further: "The long term goal of Akbayan is to facilitate, and to directly organize greater popular participation in politics. Not just formal, pro-forma participation, but effective participation. Not just through elections, but through other processes of government."<sup>62</sup> Akbayan's acceptance of constitutional democracy, however, does not mean that it completely rules out extra-constitutional forms of struggle. The party takes a proactive stance towards political crises, convulsions, and ruptures, given the Philippines' propensity to these, as shown by the First Quarter Storm of the early 70s, and the series of EDSA uprisings in 1986 and 2001.<sup>63</sup>

PMP's position vis-a-vis democratic processes appears to be somewhere between Bayan Muna's instrumental view and Akbayan's integral view. Rejecting Maoist protracted people's war strategy, PMP struggles for "democratic reform" and regards "the open and unarmed mass movement as the primary mode of struggle" in the post-authoritarian era.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, PMP participates in elections by backing the candidates of allied electoral parties and other progressive candidates. On the basis of some of its pronouncements, PMP would seem to take an instrumental position. Like the CPP, the PMP regards elections

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<sup>61</sup> Rocamora 1997a, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Akbayan 1998, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Email communication with Reynaldo Gueco, leading Akbayan political education officer, 5 June 2003.

<sup>64</sup> Ramirez 2002a.

and Congress as “bourgeois” and sees the value of participating in them mainly in terms of helping build up the strength of the popular forces for a revolutionary denouement – a “people’s democratic revolution.” PMP sees mass struggles as expanding and deepening and ultimately maturing into a people’s uprising – “a plebian-[led] not patrician-led people’s uprising like the three previous EDSA’s.”<sup>65</sup> The central task of this democratic revolution would be “to establish the revolutionary government of the workers and peasants, and of other democratic forces and parties that actively participated in the people’s revolution.” The democratic revolution would be part of a greater process of socialist revolution.<sup>66</sup>

For parties coming from ND roots like PMP, the crucial distinction vis-à-vis its electoral and parliamentary work has traditionally not been between the instrumental and integral views of democratic institutions and processes, but between revolutionary and reformist politics. This is in line with precepts in the traditional form of Marxism-Leninism emphasizing armed capture and “smashing” of the bourgeois state. Engaging in electoral and parliamentary struggle is deemed revolutionary if this is geared toward the eventual overthrow of the “reactionary state,” and reformist, if it is not. PMP’s view appears to be changing, however. “There has often been a tendency to draw too sharp a distinction between reform and revolution,” remarked one PMP leader, “We do not wish to fall into that.”<sup>67</sup> An implication of this is that PMP may be moving to a position similar to Akbayan’s on “moments.” “Struggles for democratic reform” would cease to be simply geared for that one “grand moment” of cataclysmic seizure of power and thus would be more appreciated for their intrinsic merit.

### ***Local Elections***

Since 1998, media attention to the left’s participation in electoral politics has tended to focus on the party-list ballot. The left, however, has also been busy elsewhere. Well aware of the limitations of the party-list system, left parties and groups have fielded candidates in other electoral contests, such as those at the local (municipal or city) level.

Wurfel viewed the party-list system as being “in the long run the best hope for the transformation of the *trapo* (traditional political) system into one

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<sup>65</sup> Ramirez 2002b.

<sup>66</sup> *Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino* 2002, pp. 4, 16

<sup>67</sup> Ka Miriam, forum on “Strategic Frameworks of the Philippine Left,” 5 November 2003, Quezon City.

with more programmatic parties, more responsive than at present to the needs and concerns of the majority of the people.” He seemed to suggest, however, that to stimulate political reform, a majority or at least a more substantial number of legislators would have to be elected through a party-list vote – in effect a shift to a system of proportional representation. In the short term, such a prospect does not appear to be likely, as a shift to proportional representation requires a constitutional amendment.

Victories in the party-list ballot constituted a breakthrough for several emergent left parties and groups in 1998 and for the NDs in 2001. But overall the party-list system in its current form has not made much of an impact on the *trapo* system. Traditional politicians representing different factions of the elite still constitute the overwhelming majority in both houses of Congress and they continue to operate as before. Under the Party-List System Law, fifty-odd of about 258 seats in the Lower House are supposed to be allocated for representatives of the marginalized sectors. However, only fourteen seats were filled in 1998 and twenty in 2001 because of loopholes in the law and Comelec’s poor implementation of the law. In future Congresses, even if all party-list representatives manage to get installed, they would still be very much in the minority.

To project themselves nationally, left parties need to win at least one seat in Congress through the party-list system, but in the years to come the crucial electoral battle for the left parties and groups may no longer be the party-list ballot but the local elections. Pouring all of one’s energies into the party-list vote, it is argued, merely perpetuates the system of *trapo* control of Congress and of the political system. Thus, before left parties can really put up a strong challenge in the main congressional, senatorial, and presidential contests, they first have to build up their strength from below, particularly at the municipal level.<sup>68</sup>

In electoral strategy, the Philippine left can take a leaf from the Latin American left’s book. In the 1980s, left parties chalked up victories in local elections in many Latin American countries. According to Jonathan Fox, local politics became “the most viable arenas where the Left can compete for power,

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<sup>68</sup> To some extent, this is borne out by the Philippine left’s early electoral experience – that of the SPP and the PKP in the 1930s and 40s. As mentioned earlier, the SPP/PKP never made it in their bids for national and Assembly positions before the war, but they did win in some municipal contests and were gaining ground. The momentum, however, was broken by the Japanese occupation. The DA’s near clean sweep of Central Luzon’s congressional seats in 1946 can be mainly attributed to the Hukbalahap’s and the PKP’s role in the anti-Japanese resistance, but the SPP/PKP’s prewar electoral achievements helped to build up to it.

experiment with progressive reforms, and learn how to govern.” Leftists in elected local posts undertook major “good government” reforms and at times succeeded in sweeping away entrenched traditions of corrupt clientelism. “Local government,” Fox observed, “provides the opportunity to begin to construct states that listen and deliver.”<sup>69</sup> From local, the left parties built up towards national. By the 1990s, the left had become the main *legal* opposition at the national level in a number of countries (e.g., Brazil, Uruguay and El Salvador). In 2002, the Workers’ Party came to power in Brazil.

Among the Philippine left parties, PDSP has perhaps been the most aggressive in competing in local and other non-party-list electoral contests. In fact, it has supported or fielded candidates at various levels since 1986. Unlike most left groups, PDSP has had no problems in accepting the democratic institutions and processes of post-authoritarian Philippines. PDSP’s early electoral forays had little impact, as most of the candidates it supported ran mainly under traditional parties. It fared badly in the first party-list elections, placing 63<sup>rd</sup> out of 123 groups. After party chairman Norberto Gonzales secured a Cabinet post in the Arroyo government, however, his party’s electoral fortunes improved. In 2001, PDSP did poorly again in the party-list vote (45<sup>th</sup> out of 162 parties), but it bagged one congressional seat (Abra province) and many local positions. By 2002, PDSP had more than a hundred elected officials, some of them recent party recruits. In a regional SI forum hosted by PDSP and keynoted by Arroyo, the party delegation included 39 local government officials, mostly mayors, governors and vice governors.<sup>70</sup> It is difficult, however, to gauge the party loyalty of PDSP’s elected officials, since many of them ran mainly under traditional parties or on *trapo*-dominated tickets. And whether these officials are indeed undertaking SD or progressive programs needs to be evaluated.

PDSP has had to come a long way. “During the dictatorship period,” explained PDSP chairman Norberto Gonzales, “our party was a cadre party. We had a tough education program, heavy on ideology, philosophy. After February 1986, there was a debate: Remain a cadre party or become a mass, electoral party? We opted for the latter. We became more liberal towards those who wanted to enter the party. Because of the shift, however, we lost some former cadres.”<sup>71</sup> After having been active in the anti-Marcos coalitions headed by Benigno Aquino in 1978 and Corazon Aquino in 1986, the SD groups (PDSP, Kasapi and Pandayan) and their allies were amply rewarded with positions in the

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<sup>69</sup> Fox 1995, pp. 15-19.

<sup>70</sup> Pablo 2002, p. 1.

Cory government. With better access to funding, the SDs greatly expanded their development NGO work.<sup>72</sup> Frictions soon arose, however, within the SD ranks on whether the stress should be on work in the government bureaucracy or on the mass movement. PDSP, Kasapi and Pandayan established the *Demokratikong Sosyalistang Koalisyon* (DSK) to foster SD unity, but it proved short-lived. Through its alliances with traditional parties and politicians, PDSP has tried to get into the corridors of power, hoping that from there, it would be easier to approach and recruit good, independent-minded politicians into the party.

Other left groups have been very critical of PDSP's and Gonzales' ways; in fact, many in the other left groups do not regard PDSP as left anymore. Before the collapse of the DSK in 1991, the other SD groups in the coalition had strongly reacted to PDSP's "high-handed and undemocratic methods" and questionable dealings with *trapos* and right-wing labor and peasant associations. Since then, PDSP has distanced itself even further from the other left groups and worked even more closely with *trapos*.

Some left parties and groups, e.g., Akbayan, Bayan Muna, and Sanlakas, have put up candidates in the local elections, but they have done so in a most curious fashion. Often, a candidate who was a *bona fide* member of a left party ran under a traditional party in the local polls, while at the same time campaigning for the left party in the party-list vote. In effect, he or she was affiliated with two parties – *trapo* and left! Where the candidate's main allegiance lay was open to question. The left parties tolerated this double-party affiliation since they believed they did not yet have the wherewithal to make left or progressive candidates win without some backing from a *trapo* party.

Unlike most left parties, Akbayan emphasizes participation in local elections. Rocamora explained: "This is both a matter of principle and practical politics. We participate in elections initially at the local government level where we have the resources to win and only slowly build up to the national level. Given the people's alienation from a political system dominated by upper class groups, restoring a sense of effective participation – the essence of radical democracy – can be best done at local government levels."<sup>73</sup> Among the left parties, Akbayan seems to be the most successful in local elections. In 2001, it elected eighteen mayors and over a hundred other local officials.<sup>74</sup> Many of these elected officials,

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Norberto Gonzales, 26 June 2002, in Manila.

<sup>72</sup> Rocamora 1993, p. 10.

<sup>73</sup> Rocamora 2002, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> From a list of Akbayan LGU officials presented at the Akbayan national Congress, 30-31 July 2003, in Manila. The figures do not include Akbayan-endorsed local officials.

however, are “unconsolidated,” as Akbayan has to compete with the traditional parties in influencing them and gaining their primary allegiance. A small number of Akbayan candidates for local posts, however, did run solely under Akbayan’s banner.

In contrast to Akbayan’s approach, Bayan Muna focused on the party-list elections and officially fielded only a handful of local candidates in 2001. Two official candidates for councilor – one each in Caloocan City and Davao City – won.<sup>75</sup> Many more NDs ran and won under traditional parties, however. For its part, Sanlakas, having registered as a sectoral organization and not as a party, could not put up candidates of its own in the local polls. In some areas (Rizal, Bohol and Davao Oriental), however, I found Sanlakas members who were elected to local posts running under traditional parties.

### ***Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections***

In the Philippines, “local elections” are associated with municipal, city and provincial elections. Although the barangay is the Philippines’ basic geographical unit and its government structure is a local government unit too (i.e., the lowest unit of governance in the Philippines), its elections are separate from those at other local levels. The Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) or Youth Council, which is elected by barangay youths at least fifteen and below eighteen years of age, has separate elections too.<sup>76</sup> In the 1970s and 80s, the barangay councils and the Kabataang Barangay (Barangay Youth), the precursor of SK, did not have much clout. When Marcos was in power, he easily manipulated them. With the passage of the Local Government Code in 1991, however, certain powers like making ordinances, imposing taxes, and soliciting loans were devolved to the barangay councils. Barangays received bigger internal revenue allotments; the barangay captain and council members got regular salaries or honoraria, allowances and various benefits. Since 1991, barangay and SK elections have become much livelier contests. While there have undoubtedly been candidates with a public service orientation, there have also been many of the *trapo* thinking, who have run for access to a bit of power and money (including patronage from higher politicians, gifts and bribes from local businesses,

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Ocampo.

<sup>76</sup> In 2002, however, the barangay and SK elections, both already long-delayed, were held simultaneously.



kickbacks from government projects or percentage shares from illegal activities like *jueteng*),<sup>77</sup> and for the opportunity to move up the political ladder.

Despite the provisions of a Marcos-era law that stipulates that barangay and SK elections be “non-partisan,”<sup>78</sup> they have in fact been very partisan. Mayors, governors, congresspersons and other local officials, as well as aspirants for these positions, have always been intensely involved in the barangay/SK elections and the subsequent municipal- and provincial-level *Liga ng mga Barangay* (League of Barangays) and SK Federation elections. Why? Because the barangay organization plays a crucial role, and the SK organization a supporting role, in determining the outcome of their own bids in subsequent local and congressional elections. Indeed, the barangay organization can be an electoral machine or serve as its backbone. The July 2002 barangay/SK elections were preparation for the May 2004 local and congressional elections. In one town I visited, it seemed as if the barangay captains practically carried the day in the mayoral contest of 2001: In all the barangays, the candidate supported by the barangay captain won in the barangay concerned. Another reason why mayors and governors get so involved is that the Liga and SK Federation presidencies mean two votes in the municipal council and in the provincial board. The mayor or governor sometimes needs these two votes to secure a majority in the council or board, or, in the case of a petty local autocrat, to ensure no opposition. I came across an interesting case of a mayor in Salcedo, Eastern Samar who employed the dynastic approach to get a majority in the municipal council. He had three first-degree relatives in the council: a councilor elected at large, the Liga president and the SK president. Precisely because barangay/SK and Liga/SK Federation elections are of great importance to their own political future, many mayors and mayoral aspirants closely oversee the campaigns of their candidates or even call the shots. It would sometimes seem, in fact, that it is the mayor or the mayoral aspirant himself who is running. Alberto Agra, former executive director of the Institute of Politics and Governance, sums it all up: “[B]arangay officials are cuddled and financially supported by higher local and national government officials in furtherance of the latter’s perpetuation in power.”<sup>79</sup>

Perhaps in an attempt to break loose from the “non-partisan” provision, the Comelec allowed local officials, acting individually or in their own personal

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<sup>77</sup> Patiño 1997, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> Introduced in 1982, the “non-partisan” barangay election scheme was designed to give the dictator Marcos’ party undue advantage over its rivals. See Carbonell-Catilo, et al. 1985, p. 78.

<sup>79</sup> Agra 1994, p. 26.

capacity, to campaign for their candidates outside their own barangays in the July 2002 barangay elections. Ilocos Norte Governor Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., the son of the late dictator, welcomed the move, saying, “While barangay elections are supposedly non-partisan, we all know that has not been the actual case. Higher officials do interfere in them ... [Comelec] is merely recognizing what has actually been happening all along.”<sup>80</sup>

Since the Marcos period, as mentioned earlier, the CPP-NPA has put up or endorsed candidates in barangay elections to frustrate the government’s counter-insurgency moves, engage in political proselytization and project open mass leaders. The CPP-NPA’s instrumental view of barangay elections contrasts with that of emergent left parties like Akbayan, which see potentials for developing participatory democracy. According to Rocamora, the creation of barangay government units under the 1991 Local Government Code opened “the possibility of lowering the center of gravity of Philippine politics from the town and city centers where elites dominate to the level of the barangay.” Now that the barangays had some ordinance-making powers and funds, barangay politics could stop being only an adjunct of town politics. “The Local Government Code,” he added, “also provides for barangay assemblies with limited legislative powers where all barangay residents can participate, the only form of direct democracy available in the existing political system. Barangay governments are obliged to formulate barangay development plans through the creation of a barangay development council with provisions for NGO and people’s organization participation. These institutional arrangements open up the possibility of a broadly participatory political process.”<sup>81</sup> In 1996, several NGOs that later aligned with Akbayan responded to a request from some PO leaders who wanted to run in the May 1997 barangay elections and put together a course on electoral campaign management for the candidates. Since then, Akbayan and allied NGOs have moved on to the nitty-gritty of participatory barangay governance.

Like all of the *trapo* parties, many of the major left parties have participated in the barangay/SK elections by fielding or endorsing candidates – without unfurling their banners, of course. Since all parties have to keep up with the pretense of being “non-partisan,” it is virtually impossible to get accurate data on just how many candidates of left parties won in the barangay/SK elections in 2002, but we do know that a significant number of candidates from the left won in the 1997 barangay elections. A partial tally indicates that over a

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<sup>80</sup> Galing 2002, p. 1. (*Partly translated from Filipino.*)

<sup>81</sup> Rocamora 2000a, p. 5.

thousand candidates identified with political groups that later formed Akbayan and Sanlakas (i.e., as Comelec-registered entities) won positions, including almost two hundred candidates for barangay captain.<sup>82</sup> The tally did not cover candidates of the ND movement.

The CPP-NPA's policy on barangay elections has remained basically unchanged. The contest for control of a good number of the country's barangays, particularly in the hinterlands, between government forces and the CPP-NPA continues. In the July 2002 barangay elections, the military declared many NPA areas as "hotspots," after receiving numerous reports of CPP-NPA involvement. Bayan Muna expressed concern about the military's assessment, asserting that the "hotspots" were actually areas where it had a strong following and well-established mass organizations.<sup>83</sup> The CPP claims that the NPA now operates in 8,500 barrios [barangays] or 18 percent of the total number of Philippine barrios and that the number of barrios where the NPA operates has increased by 71 percent from 1980 to 2001 and by 28 percent from 1994 to 2001.<sup>84</sup> The military has come up with a higher figure for NPA-influenced barrios. "If the military is to be believed," wrote one journalist, "the number of New People's Army (NPA) rebels is on the rise and about a fourth of barangays nationwide could be controlled by the leftist Bayan Muna if barangay elections were held today."<sup>85</sup>

With all the stakes involved for both *trapos* and for the CPP-NPA, it is no wonder that barangay/SK elections have become as violence-marred as other elections. At least 87 people were killed and 45 injured in 183 violent incidents in connection with the barangay/SK elections in 2002. Comelec officials reported 26 incidents on election day itself, including two shooting cases, two cases of ballot snatching, burning of a school and a ballot box, and discovery of ready-made ballots. (The day after the elections, President Arroyo thanked Filipinos for "our generally peaceful elections.")<sup>86</sup> Election-related violence is often mainly attributed to *trapos*. According to a Comelec commissioner, however, the NPA committed most of the election-related violence during the 2002 barangay/SK polls.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Patiño 1997, p. 2. The left groups involved in the 1997 vote openly talked about the candidates they backed since they were not yet registered electoral parties then.

<sup>83</sup> Canuday 2002, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Liwanag 2002, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> Hofileña 2002b, p. 21.

<sup>86</sup> Burgonio and Roque 2002, p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> Dancel 2002, p. 1.

## *Moving into the Main Electoral Arena*

For all the left successes at the local and barangay levels, many left parties and groups still train their primary attention on the party-list ballot. In the electoral fight against the *trapos*, however, it is the “regular” electoral contests – i.e., local, congressional by district, senatorial and presidential – and not the party-list ballot that are the main arena in the electoral fight against the *trapos*. It is in the “regular” elections where a candidate of alternative politics comes face to face with the heart of *trapo* politics – with patronage and “guns, goons and gold.” In the 1998 party-list elections, the left parties and groups did face some challenge from the *trapos*, mainly through the latter’s surrogates. In 2001, however, their main rivals were definitely not the *trapos*.<sup>88</sup> In practice, Bayan Muna treated the other left parties as its main rivals in the party-list ballot, and vice-versa. Bayan Muna’s leftist rivals encountered more problems with NPA guerrillas than with *trapos*’ goons.<sup>89</sup> Only in the other electoral contests were the left parties mainly up against the *trapos* and *trapo* parties and their dirty tricks. Left-mainly-versus-left is bound to be repeated in future party-list elections; left-mainly-versus-*trapo*, in future “regular” elections where the left fields candidates.

The left, through its participation, however sporadic, in elections in the past seven decades, has accumulated an appreciable amount of experience in running electoral campaigns and dealing with *trapo* tricks. Drawing from this experience, many left parties and groups have devised guides and training kits on electoral campaign management, poll watching, how to prevent election cheating, etc., which have proven effective in helping some progressives defeat *trapos*, even in places where the latter employed the entire regalia of “guns, goons and gold.” But before the left can become a formidable electoral force, much more needs to be done. Left parties and groups could conceivably counter the *trapos*’ demagogic or populist appeals with good issues and platforms and check the *trapos*’ use of fraud and terrorism through vigilant poll-watching, media liaison, and mass mobilization. The *trapos*’ arsenal, however, includes the exploitation of traditional patron-client relations and other personalistic ties, the artful use of pork barrel, etc. – weapons that often are more effective than fraud

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<sup>88</sup> Had the major traditional parties really wanted to dominate the party-list vote in 2001, they would have poured more resources into their party-list campaigns. Only two major traditional parties made it to the minimum threshold – good for only one seat each – before the Supreme Court disqualified the big traditional parties from the party-list vote.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Rosales.

and terrorism in the electoral arena. *Trapos* build and develop clientelist ties with their supporters not just during elections but as part of their daily routine, whether in or out of public office. Many of them are good at maintaining personalistic styles and appropriating local traditions and practices. “The fact that we now construe song and dance, handshakes, attending weddings and wakes as ‘traditional’ in a negative way,” noted Patrick Patiño, “shows how thoroughly so-called *trapos* have appropriated these traditions to their advantage.”<sup>90</sup> The left, in other words, would have to combat a most pervasive and pernicious *trapo* political culture – the world of nepotism, cronyism, distorted *kumpadre-kumare* (extended kinship) relationships, *lagayan* (bribery), *palakasan* (influence-peddling), *weather-weather* (the spoils system), “boss” culture, etc.

A widespread and particularly baneful practice in *trapo* political culture is vote-buying. Frederic Charles Schaffer found that in the May 2001 national elections, one out of every 10 Filipinos was offered money or material goods to vote for a certain candidate and that seven out of every 10 took the bribe. The poor who accepted money had mixed set of motives; almost a third said that they needed it. A psychographic study on voter behavior conducted by the Institute for Political and Electoral Reform (IPER) in 2004 came up with much higher figures: 48 percent of voters were offered bribes, and 75 percent of those offered accepted the bribe. The most common explanations of those who got the money were that they felt powerless to prevent it; that it was a fact of life; that their lives remained miserable; and that the money would benefit them.<sup>91</sup>

In the course of my fieldwork, I discovered that left parties and groups experienced particular difficulty in trying to counter vote-buying. In many places I visited, e.g. Bohol, Eastern Samar, Albay and Davao Oriental, I found that vote-buying had become the rule, not the exception, and that payoffs were getting bigger and bigger with every election. Candidates who refrained from vote-buying often lost. Thus, many candidates who were otherwise well-meaning and public service-oriented, including some progressive candidates, succumbed to the practice, accepting it as a fact of Philippine politics. Voters seemed to have grown inured to the practice as it was widely held that politicians were in government mainly to enrich themselves, their relatives, and close friends, and it did not really matter who won. For many voters, elections at least provided the opportunity to make some easy money. In 1987, an ND activist asked some

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<sup>90</sup> Patiño 1997, p. 13.

peasants in a “consolidated” NPA guerrilla zone why they had sold their votes instead of voting for PnB. “We give ourselves to the revolution 364 days of the year,” replied one, “Give us just this one day.”<sup>92</sup>

Kerkvliet points out that while many Filipinos use elections to advance personal and factional interests and capture the spoils of government and see elections as battles fought with “guns, goons and gold,” others struggle to make elections be about legitimacy, fairness and democratic processes. He cited cases in the past, such as the elections in 1947-53 and the fateful snap presidential polls of 1986, when voters guarded ballot boxes, monitored the counting of votes and stood their ground, even as armed men and officials tried to scare them off. Elections, he notes, have themselves become a struggle, a contest, about “the meaning and purpose of elections.”<sup>93</sup>

In her study of the 1992 elections in a hacienda area in Murcia, Negros Occidental, Rosanne Rutten examines the candidates’ campaign pitches, particularly the “cultural” frames used in wooing hacienda workers, as well as the response of the workers, who had been supportive of the CPP-NPA before. Rutten observes that the candidates used both the “patronage frame” of traditional politicians and the “oppression frame” of “new politics.” The workers, who had been socialized to two apparently contradictory cultural frames, responded positively to both frames. They evaluated the candidates on the basis of both frames, participated in both clientelist and “new” politics, and recognized the legitimacy of both.<sup>94</sup> Rutten’s finding suggests that the contest over the meaning of elections, far from being a competition between mutually exclusive opposites, is a much more complicated affair.

Such complexity is also discussed in a study of Raul Pertierra delving into electoral politics in Zamora, Ilocos Sur, in which he notes the inconsistency between political support and voting behavior. Pertierra observes that during the 1986 presidential elections, many voters of Zamora expressed their moral support for Aquino but nonetheless cast their votes for Marcos. He relates this to the remark of a Catholic activist after PnB’s poor showing in 1987 that the NDF had the support of the Filipino people but not their votes. In Pertierra’s analysis, two views of elections are recognized in the Philippines: elections as “an expression of a political will in which case they are both representative and

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<sup>91</sup> Schaffer 2003, pp. 1-2; Institute for Political and Electoral Reform (IPER) 2004, pp. 27-30.

<sup>92</sup> Narrated to me by Ka Dencio, March 22, 2002, in Makati.

<sup>93</sup> Kerkvliet 1995, pp. 408-9; Kerkvliet 1996, pp. 137, 152-61.

<sup>94</sup> Rutten 1994, pp. 1-34.

participative” and as “an instance of domination where they are used simply as a means for structural reproduction and legitimation.” Political or moral support for Aquino (in Zamora) and for the NDs failed to translate into votes, as the view of representation and participation gave way to the realities of reproduction and legitimation.<sup>95</sup>

The left parties and groups have themselves contributed to the blurring of the distinction between *trapo*/patronage politics and “new politics” by forging alliances with *trapo* parties or individual *trapos* and by letting or even encouraging their members or close allies to run under *trapo* parties and coalitions. Such practices may indeed be necessary compromises that the left parties have to make in order to build themselves up and challenge the *trapos*. If the more democratically oriented left parties truly want their anti-*trapo* message to be as sharp as possible, however, they would have to put an end at some point to de facto double-party membership (*trapo* and left!) and take a more judicious alliance policy.

For the left to achieve the capability of truly breaking the hegemony of *trapos* in Philippine electoral politics and helping bring about an institutionalized political party system, those with an integral conception of democracy would have to gain the upper hand over those with an instrumental view – within the electoral left, at the very least. The instrumentalists tend to put a hedge around electoral engagement because they do not really believe that the Philippine political system can be changed (except by violent overthrow), or that the majority of the *trapos* can be electorally defeated. As more left candidates win and get exposed to the hard realities of actual governance, more left activists, parties, and groups may well shift to the integral view. In the CPP’s case, perhaps only a negotiated political settlement with the government – at present, truly a long shot – could make it budge from its instrumental outlook. With the CPP still fixated on “total victory,” Bayan Muna will likely move to an integral conception of democracy only if it is able to exercise considerable autonomy.

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<sup>95</sup> Pertierra 1995b, pp. 15-38.

## Chapter V

# The Left's Engagement in Government and Governance

Working in public office and governance, even more than elections, are a field of endeavor that the left in the Philippines has spurned for a long time. During the Marcos dictatorship, leftists – NDs and SDs – often looked with disdain on comrades and allies who accepted government appointments, regarding them as having capitulated to the regime. When Marcos liberalized somewhat and allowed elections to be held starting in 1978, the NDs were very critical of those in the traditional opposition who ran in these elections and took office, contending that these oppositionists were helping to legitimize the regime and its “rubber-stamp” parliament. After the fall of Marcos, many in the left continued to keep away from getting involved in government work, as they looked upon the new order as a fake democracy or as merely being the return of “elite” or “bourgeois” democracy. They viewed the government as being corruption-ridden, dominated and run by *trapos*, who represented an oligarchic elite that preyed on it. Hence, government office was a dirty job.

The left has taken some time to get used to the idea of having some within its ranks working in government. Upon assuming office, President Aquino appointed some leftists and progressives to government positions. However, they did not get much support for their reform initiatives from a fragmented progressive movement and some got co-opted into *trapo* politics. The most prominent progressives left government.<sup>1</sup> Although some candidates of the leftist PnB did win in the congressional elections of 1987 and the local elections of 1988, PnB became inactive soon after the 1988 polls and thus did not gain much experience in government work. The left has since then, and especially over the last six years, become more involved in government work. The major factor, of



course, has been the victory of some candidates of leftist parties and groups in the party-list vote and in local and barangay elections in 1997-2004. The engagement of left parties in government work is still very modest, but it shows signs of growing rapidly in the coming years

In Chapter II, I discussed how left parties and groups coming from the ND tradition moved from an outright rejection (or boycott) of processes and institutions of “elite” or “bourgeois” democracy to an instrumental view of these processes, and how some left groups moved further on to an integral view of democracy and democratic processes. The instrumental-integral distinction holds not just for elections (which I traced and examined in Chapter IV), but for formal institutions of the state as well: the legislature, the executive branch, local governments, etc. In this chapter, I trace the development of the left’s government work – from virtual non-engagement to substantial engagement in government work – since the fall of Marcos. I cover the work of left parties and groups in Congress and in some departments and agencies of the executive branch, and their work in local government units (LGUs) at the barangay, municipal and city levels. I discuss the response of left forces to two developments that have had a significant impact on government work in the post-authoritarian era: coalition politics and government decentralization. Towards the end of this chapter, I present four contending strategic perspectives or approaches in government work and governance<sup>2</sup> – two from the right (the patrimonial and revisionist neoliberal approaches) and two from the left (the revolutionary and radical democratic perspectives). In the Philippines’ contested democracy, the radical democratic perspective represents a creditable left alternative to the “patrimonial approach” to public office and governance of the country’s oligarchic elite. However, those bearing this perspective face great odds. Apart from having to do battle with the patrimonialists, they are also up against the revisionist neoliberals who now overwhelmingly dominate the governance and development discourse in the Philippines.

### ***The Left in Congress***

According to Roberts, a left party that has an instrumental view of democracy participates in democratic processes and institutions for “political

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<sup>1</sup> Rocamora 2002, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> As used here, “government” refers to “the institutions and agents charged with governing,” and “governance,” to “the modes and manner of governing.” Jessop 1998, p. 30.

proselytization, aiming not so much to gain access to government office as to spread its message, expand its organizational networks, and develop a critical consciousness among popular sectors to hasten the dawning of a revolutionary situation.”<sup>3</sup> PnB was clearly in this mode. In the elections in which it participated, its primary concern proved to be to conduct propaganda for the revolutionary movement. Winning was secondary. In its early electoral bids (the 1987 congressional and 1988 local elections), PnB performed way below the NDs’ expectations (see chapter IV). PnB’s dismal initial showing was compounded by its failings in providing leadership and direction to winning candidates – two congressmen and 18 local officials – and to other winning progressives who had run under traditional parties but still identified themselves or worked closely with the ND movement. The party did not seem to care much about work in government. “After the 1987-88 elections,” remarks Rosales, PnB president in 1991-2, “the PnB leadership did not even bother to take care of those who won, to consolidate the party’s modest victories.”<sup>4</sup>

From the start, there had always been doubts about how serious a political project PnB was. Its erratic operations soon after the 1987 debacle tended to reinforce these doubts. The National Council did not meet; the party’s executive officers ran the show. A PnB leader served as the link and “political officer” to the congressmen and their staffs, as neither of the two PnB congressmen was in the core of the party leadership. PnB actually did recruit and assign some ND cadres and activists to work in the staffs of the two congressmen. Such an arrangement, however, proved most inadequate. “We were often clueless on the big scheme of things,” comments Ka Dencio, a former staff member. Reflecting just how little importance the NDs then attached to the electoral struggle and especially to government work, PnB “practically dissolved itself” after the 1988 elections.<sup>5</sup> The party closed down its national offices and ND cadres and activists assigned to it were shifted to other lines of work.<sup>6</sup> “PnB was just a label for an experiment,” says Ka Dencio. “When the experiment failed, PnB was discarded like a disposable napkin.” Despite being left to their own devices, the two PnB congressmen consistently took left-wing positions on national issues, e.g., land reform, militarization, U.S. bases, etc. The abandoned PnB congressmen and local officials eventually joined traditional parties.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Roberts 1998, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Etta Rosales, 12 January 2003, in Quezon City.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Ka Dencio, 22 March 2002, in Makati.

<sup>6</sup> Partido ng Bayan 1993, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Ka Dencio.

“If progressives want to play a significant role in governance,” writes IPD’s Jennifer Albano in retrospect, “they must take part in the formal institutions of the state.”<sup>8</sup> When the left returned to Congress through the party-list vote in 1998 and 2001, it took the work in the legislature more seriously. The left parties that made it in the party-list ballot – ABA, Abanse Pinay, Akbayan, AKO, Sanlakas, and later, also Bayan Muna, AMIN and PM – are more involved in what their congresspersons are doing, whether pushing for bills and resolutions, issuing press statements and delivering privilege speeches, or appropriating funds for projects. The congresspersons themselves are among the core leaders of these parties. While earnest about their work in Congress, these left parties and groups do not necessarily share the same framework or perspective. In the main, those coming from the ND tradition view the work in Congress merely as a means for advancing the revolutionary struggle, while those from the SD and “mixed” traditions basically take an integral view of democratic processes and institutions.

With Bayan Muna, the NDs have worked much more determinedly to win at the polls than they did with PnB in 1987-8 and they are now apparently much more engaged in congressional work than before. Still adhering to “protracted people’s war,” however, the NDs remain in the instrumentalist mode. In essence, thus, Bayan Muna is the same as PnB. The NDs’ main objective continues to be political proselytization – at the hustings during the election campaign, and then right in the halls of Congress after the elections.

In a statement after the 2001 elections, the CPP reiterated that electoral struggle and legislative work are secondary to revolutionary armed struggle and to the open mass movement, and clarified their role as follows:

[E]lectoral struggles and work within the reactionary parliament do carry importance for the progressive and democratic forces. It is our fundamental and principal duty to expose the rottenness of the reactionary system and fight it simultaneously from within and from without, project the revolutionary alternative and point to the path that leads to it. Along with this, we may take advantage of the space and opportunity provided, in order to achieve tactical gains for the people and the progressive and democratic movement. This, while we

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<sup>8</sup> Albano 2001, p. 20.

maintain strict vigilance and resist being enticed and gobbled up by the rotten system.<sup>9</sup>

In the light of Bayan Muna's main function of political proselytization, the party's three representatives in Congress have been most prolific in issuing press statements, outstripping even the most publicity-oriented among other congressional representatives.<sup>10</sup> The Bayan Muna representatives have also filed or co-sponsored many bills and resolutions. The media releases and filed bills and resolutions have mainly been in the nature of exposing and opposing "the rottenness of the reactionary system" and defending the NDs' mass base. The biggest number of press statements and resolutions, for instance, have to do with denunciations of, or inquiries into, alleged human rights violations committed by government forces engaged in military operations against the CPP-NPA; and with opposition to the US-led "war on terrorism" that target the CPP-NPA, among other groups, in the Philippines. Bayan Muna has also devoted much attention to such other issues as corruption, consumers' issues, women, labor, and globalization. Congressman Ocampo admits that his party did not really expect most of its bills to be passed.<sup>11</sup> The House has approved some Bayan Muna resolutions, but most of these have merely been for inquiries and investigations into abuses and irregularities. Not all of Bayan Muna's interventions have been of the "expose and oppose" type. For instance, Bayan Muna Congresswoman Liza Masa was one of the principal sponsors of a bill for combating trafficking in persons especially women and minors that was enacted into law. The articulate and personable Ocampo, a well-respected journalist in pre-martial law days and a high-profile NDF negotiator after the fall of Marcos, has been most effective in projecting the party and attracting allies.

While rejecting "protracted people's war," other parties and groups of the ND tradition, such as PMP and electoral parties aligned with it, retain a revolutionary perspective. In 1994, when the CPP had just split, Lagman, who later founded PMP, agreed with the CPP that "revolution is war." He criticized the CPP, however, for waging a revolutionary war even when the proper conditions for transforming revolution into war, or political struggle into military struggle, had not yet developed. Chiding Sison for earlier dismissing participation in parliament as "a fool's game," Lagman argued that the conditions in Russia in Lenin's time were a lot worse than present-day conditions in the

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<sup>9</sup> CPP Central Committee 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Ka Dencio.

Philippines, and yet the Bolsheviks had participated in elections and worked in the Duma (parliament) for several years, as part of their efforts to accumulate strength and to set the stage for revolution. “Lenin played a ‘fool’s game’ for several years,” wrote Lagman, “never calling for a revolutionary war until the conditions for such a war arose.”<sup>12</sup>

Renato Magtubo, who has represented two PMP-aligned electoral parties in the House of Representatives (Sanlakas in 1998-2001 and PM in 2003-4), has been most consistent – and more forthright than the Bayan Muna legislators – in treating Congress mainly as a venue for revolutionary proselytization. From the outset, he said that he was in Congress “to try to articulate society’s cry for change – profound social change” and that he was a leader of the militant BMP, whose “main objective is a political revolution, a workers’ revolution to overhaul the capitalist system.”<sup>13</sup> With regard to bills and resolutions, Magtubo did not make much of a mark. However, the in-your-face privileged speeches of the political maverick proved controversial, often drawing angry responses from other representatives. In April 2000, Magtubo and Akbayan’s Rosales hogged the headlines for exposing a big *payola* (pay-off) in the House of Representatives that implicated their fellow representatives in the House – a most blatant case of *trapo* corruption. Going much further than Rosales, Magtubo virtually labeled the House of Representatives “a den of thieves” and “a stinking pigsty” and virtually accused his colleagues of “lying to their teeth.” Reacting to threats of expulsion from the House, Magtubo defiantly rejoined: “You cannot intimidate me. *Hindi ako nag-iisa!* [I am not alone!] I belong to the real majority – the toiling masses of our people.” And he warned: “Those who hinder the road to reform only pave the way for revolution.”<sup>14</sup>

The stance of PMP and allied electoral parties vis-à-vis government work, however, appears to be changing. “There has often been a tendency to draw too sharp a distinction between reform and revolution,” clarifies one PMP leader. “We do not wish to fall into that.”<sup>15</sup> In Congress, PM and Sanlakas became more involved in pushing for reforms, especially those in support of workers. In late 2003, for instance, PM representative Magtubo and Sanlakas representative Jose

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Ocampo, 11 January 2003, in Quezon City.

<sup>12</sup> Lagman 1994, p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> Magtubo 1998, pp. 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> Magtubo 2000 pp. 3-4.

<sup>15</sup> Ka Miriam, forum on “Strategic Frameworks of the Philippine Left,” Quezon City, 5 November 2003.

Bautista pressed for the passage of a bill seeking to increase the retirement pay of workers in the private sector.<sup>16</sup>

Left parties of the mixed ND-SD tradition (Akbayan) and of the SD tradition (e.g., ABA-AKO) have an integral conception of democracy and recognize the intrinsic value of formal democratic processes and institutions like elections and Congress. Akbayan participates in these processes avowedly in order to “achieve concrete gains for the people and to weaken elite rule,”<sup>17</sup> and not merely to engage in advocacy or “propaganda” for some far-off revolutionary change. “The contradiction between the form and substance of elite rule, between political democracy and social disparity,” says Rocamora, “presents a substantial opportunity for a political party that will engage in mainstream political processes to advance a redistributive agenda.”<sup>18</sup> Akbayan aims to make Congress a more democratic institution and hopes to eventually move it from elite domination to popular control. Espousing program-based politics, Akbayan seeks to do away with the practices of personality- and patronage-based politics like corruption and horse-trading in the policy-making process.<sup>19</sup>

As a neophyte congressperson, Akbayan Representative Rosales actively participated in a number of committees, and authored or co-sponsored dozens of bills and resolutions covering a wide span of concerns. In recognition of her good work, at least in part, the House leadership appointed her the chairperson of the committee on civil, political and human rights at the start of her second term. Since 2001, four bills principally authored by Rosales – notably the Absentee Voting Law – and six bills co-authored by her have been enacted into law, and 20 more (two authored and 18 co-authored) have been passed by the House. In addition, 24 resolutions she filed, plus ten co-authored, have been passed by the chamber. Her legislative and advocacy work have been related to human rights, labor, agrarian issues, women, overseas Filipinos, education, political and electoral reform, and national sovereignty. With Rosales as head of the Party-List Caucus and chair of the Subcommittee on Party-List and Sectoral Representation, the Party-List representatives have taken common positions on Party-List Law amendments.<sup>20</sup> Often sought for interviews by the mass media, the articulate Akbayan representative has become one of the most visible legislators. In an editorial, a Philippine daily newspaper made a rare

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<sup>16</sup> Cruz 2003, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Akbayan National Congress 2003b, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Rocamora 1997a, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Rocamora 1997b, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Rosales 2003, pp. 1-3, 12.

compliment: "Forget the others. The only party-list member who has been of any real service to our country is Etta Rosales."<sup>21</sup>

### ***Coalition Politics: Dangers and Opportunities***

Coalition politics, asserts Patricio N. Abinales, has become "the defining feature of political warfare" and "a new way of governing" in the Philippines. Since the fall of Marcos, "big tent" alliances that draw together forces from the right, center and left have replaced political parties as the means by which groups and individuals aspire to and wield power. Although ideologically opposed, the forces temporarily set aside their differences and unite for a common objective, e.g., the election of a presidential candidate. Once in power, they apportion among themselves the top positions in the government bureaucracy. "Under leaders capable of balancing the interests of these disparate forces," observes Abinales, "coalition politics can considerably benefit governing. But the marriage between coalition politics and stable governing also has a limit. Under less-than-competent leadership, a coalition can unravel and affect the ability of a regime to govern, as was the case under President Estrada."<sup>22</sup>

According to Felipe B. Miranda, a political scientist and commentator, coalition politics was a major policy thrust of the Ramos administration. In the name of "national unification," Ramos systematically recruited pliant politicians, including even "treasonous" figures of the Marcos dictatorship, into "rainbow" coalitions, and endeavored to integrate rebel groups – military rebels, as well as communist and secessionist insurgents – into the main body politic. Citing surveys by the Social Weather Stations, Miranda points out that there was broad political support for such "ultra-comprehensive coalition politics" – "a popular belief that a political consensus must be forged among all sectors of Philippine society for the country to progress." This attitude, he analyzes, "underscores the desperation of a people who in the last two decades had been systematically blocked in the pursuit of national development."<sup>23</sup>

Of course, *trapos* and their parties dominate the "big tent" coalitions. Wary about being co-opted or manipulated by the *trapos*, left parties and groups have actually often been unenthusiastic about these coalitions, or at best, ambivalent towards them. None of them, except PDSP, has formally or officially

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<sup>21</sup> *Today* 2001, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Abinales 2001a, pp. 154-61.

<sup>23</sup> Miranda 1993, p. 5.

joined these coalitions.<sup>24</sup> The “representatives” of the left in the coalitions are usually individual personages who are close allies, former leaders or non-leading members of left parties. Prominent leftists Horacio Morales, Jr. and Edicio de la Torre, both former leading NDs and “popdems,” did not belong to any political party when they joined Estrada’s coalition.<sup>25</sup> While in government, they worked closely with such left groups as Akbayan and AMIN until the start of the “Oust Erap” campaign.

The brief, hard-luck stint of leftists in the Estrada administration has shown the pitfalls of participating in “big tent” alliances. While the leftists and other “state reformists” performed relatively well and maintained “isles of state efficiency,”<sup>26</sup> it was clientelist politics as usual in other departments, and the president and his cronies engaged in patrimonial plunder. In Olle Törnquist’s analysis, Morales and De la Torre had followed the “pragmatic argument” that “leading democrats should make their way to the top by drawing on the ‘traditional’ clientelist and populist clout of certain leaders.” The grand experiment “to boost Estrada and use his strength to expand and promote radical reforms ... ended in outright failure.” Morales’ and De la Torre’s decision “to stay on the sinking ship” in the hope of increasing their influence on the captain should he survive the storm was a costly political mistake.<sup>27</sup>

According to Martin Tanchuling, the executive director of a rural development NGO, the appointment of progressives to high government positions has quite often led to frictions and strains between different left groups and allied POs/NGOS trying to influence the appointees’ policies and programs. One such divide has been that between groups coming from the ND tradition and those from the SD tradition. Sometimes, he said, the rivalries, which have even affected the appointees’ choices in the hiring of personnel, no longer seem to be much different from the *trapos*’ “weather-weather” jockeying for influence.<sup>28</sup>

Left participation in “big tent” coalitions, however, has not been all negative. Although the 1986 Constitutional Commission, whose members were all appointed by President Aquino, was dominated by members of the elite, the

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<sup>24</sup> Although Bayan Muna supported almost all of President Arroyo’s senatorial candidates in exchange for her endorsement of its bid in the party-list vote in 2001, Bayan Muna did not officially join Arroyo’s “People Power Coalition.”

<sup>25</sup> Although Morales and De la Torre helped in the setting up of Akbayan and many of their fellow “popdems” became members of the new party, they themselves did not join it.

<sup>26</sup> Abinales 2001a, p. 158.

<sup>27</sup> Törnquist 2002, pp. 42, 60, 63.



leftists (e.g., NDs, SDs and independents) and liberal progressives in the commission managed to have a good number of progressive provisions included in the draft charter. The “Freedom Constitution” ratified in February 1987 contained an expanded bill of rights and certain “protectionist” provisions on the national economy and patrimony. Left parties and groups are themselves now availing of provisions on the role and rights of POs/NGOs, the introduction of the party-list system, government decentralization, etc. whether for revolutionary proselytization or for the transformation of an elite-dominated democracy into a more participatory and egalitarian one.

The appointment of reform-oriented progressives, including some “popdems” and SDs, to key positions in the Department of Agrarian Reform during the Ramos and Estrada administrations<sup>29</sup> encouraged land reform advocates within both civil society and the state to pursue a “*bibinka* strategy” in land reform implementation, combining initiatives by “state reformists” from above with mobilizations of POs/NGOs “from below.” Thanks in large part to this symbiotic interaction, the post-Marcos Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme (CARP), against most expectations, registered significant accomplishments in counteracting strong landlord resistance to agrarian reform and facilitating land redistribution to poor peasants. By the end of 1999, the program had succeeded in redistributing 4.84 million hectares of land, or about 60 per cent of its target, directly benefiting about 2.1 million rural poor households.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the Morales-De la Torre imbroglio, some left parties and groups have remained open to the idea of progressives, even their own members, taking up posts in the executive branch of the government. ABA Representative Leonardo Montemayor gave up his seat in Congress to serve as Arroyo’s Secretary of Agriculture, but he was eased out in a Cabinet reorganization a year later. As a member organization of the Barangay-Bayan [Village-Municipal] Governance Consortium (BBGC), Akbayan continues to adhere to a “dual power strategy,” which consists of “building strong, autonomous POs taking on sectoral issues and concerns” and working with “progressives in government (or putting

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Martin Tanchuling, executive director of the Philippine Network of Rural Development Institutes (Philnet-RDI), 14 October, 2003, in Amsterdam. “Weather-weather,” a Filipino pun, refers to the spoils system.

<sup>29</sup> Notably Secretary Ernesto Garilao and Undersecretary Gerardo Bulatao under Ramos and Secretary Morales under Estrada.

<sup>30</sup> Borras 2001, pp. 531-61. Borras’ assessment of Morales’ reform efforts contradicts Tornquist’s point that these were an outright failure.

in some of our own).”<sup>31</sup> In Rocamora’s view (as of April 2002), it was fine for progressives to work within the Arroyo regime and pursue reforms “[a]s long as the overall impact of the regime’s policies has not reached a point where we are obliged to call for Arroyo’s ouster,” and “[a]s long as the balance of power within the cabinet continues to provide maneuver space for our allies within government.” Arroyo remained vulnerable to PO/NGO advocacies, in Rocamora’s assessment, because there were reformers in the Cabinet and in key agencies and because POs/NGOs could draw support from the church and big business on some reform issues.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from supporting progressives in government, Akbayan, since 2001, has actively worked for the appointment of several of its members to certain government positions. Under Arroyo (as under Estrada), several Akbayan members have taken up positions in the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC). Created by virtue of the “Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act” of 1998, the NAPC coordinates and oversees the implementation of the government’s Social Reform Agenda (SRA), develops and promotes microfinance schemes, and acts as the lead agency of *Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan* (Kalahi) or Linking Arms against Poverty, the Arroyo administration’s strategic program for poverty reduction. According to NAPC Vice-Chair for Basic Sectors and Akbayan leader Oscar Francisco, the commission would intensify its efforts, among others, in securing funds for CARP from the “coconut levy” and from the “Marcos wealth”; in successfully carrying out the “Community Mortgage Program” for urban poor; in promoting community-based enterprise development; and in effectively implementing laws supporting or protecting poor fishermen, senior citizens, the handicapped, and indigenous peoples.<sup>33</sup>

In recent years, the inclusion of the left in “big tent” coalitions has not been limited to the executive branch of government. For their participation in EDSA II and their support for the successful bid of Jose de Venecia for the speakership of the House of Representatives, left parties like Bayan Muna and Akbayan have been included in the majority bloc of the House, which is dominated by Arroyo’s PPC. Thanks to their being in the majority bloc, Bayan Muna and Akbayan have had better access to project funds, and Akbayan’s Rosales was appointed chairperson of the human rights committee. Neither party

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<sup>31</sup> Villarin 2001, p. 2. The “dual power strategy” is essentially the “*bibingka* strategy,” but with a “democratic participation in governance” component, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>32</sup> Rocamora 2002, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Francisco 2003, p. 2.

has had to toe the line of the Arroyo administration; in fact, both have been increasingly critical. Yet they have not been expelled from the majority bloc nor sanctioned. Keeping them in the “majority” may be more of a preemptive move. It is very much possible that the House leadership prefers these left parties to remain in-bloc opposition, rather than to forge a potentially powerful coalition with the *trapo* opposition.

Through careful and judicious engagement with “big tent” coalition politics, democratic left parties and groups can conceivably go beyond merely supporting or placing a number of progressives in government. The looseness of “big tent” coalitions affords a democratic left party with opportunities for drawing progressives in government together, creating progressive groups and blocs within both the executive and legislative branches of government, and eventually recruiting these progressives into the party.

### ***The Left and Decentralization***

Although the left, in general, has long spurned working in government, the revolutionary left has long been *getting into* local government. Since the Marcos era, says former CPP Politburo member Ricardo Reyes, the CPP-NPA has tried to win over many barangay officials, even entire barangay councils, to its side, recruited a good number of these officials into its ranks, and supported or even put up candidates in barangay elections. This has been a common practice, especially in CPP-NPA guerrilla zones. Links with barangay officials and candidates, however, have been of a clandestine nature. The CPP-NPA’s objective in such involvement in barangay politics has not been to turn the barangay councils into models of good government, but to “neutralize” them or render them inutile and prevent them from being used for “counter-insurgency,” and to tap individuals within or the councils themselves for various needs of the revolutionary movement, e.g., material support, intelligence work on the “enemy,” etc. Its involvement in barangay government or governance, hence, has not been real engagement. “The CPP did not have any idea of local governance,” remarks Reyes. “It did not really care much for the barangay councils. The stress was on building barrio [barangay] revolutionary committees as an alternative organ of revolutionary power. No matter how hard it tried to build these revolutionary committees, however, it did not succeed much.” In the urban areas, the objective was different. During the Marcos era, for instance, getting into the barangay council was found to be useful in certain cases for “helping build an

anti-dictatorship front.” There have been no indications of any significant change in the CPP-NPA’s policy of “neutralizing” the barangay councils.<sup>34</sup>

It may be said that the left’s engagement in local government in the post-Marcos period began with President Aquino’s appointment of some leftists to “officer-in-charge” positions soon after EDSA I or with the electoral victories of some PnB candidates in the 1988 local elections. These were times, however, when the left was still quite disoriented in the light of the 1986 boycott fiasco. Thus, PnB and other left groups failed to provide much direction or leadership to the leftists who had been appointed or elected to local government posts. The latter were largely left to fend for themselves, especially after PnB closed its national offices. Serious engagement of the left in local government came later through a circuitous route, and it started at the barangay level rather than at the municipal or city level.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, emergent left groups, together with POs and NGOs aligned with them, engaged more seriously in development work, even as they continued to be actively involved in “pressure” or contentious politics – rallies, marches and other protest actions. Among these new left groups were the “popular democrats” (or “popdems”), Bisig and Pandayan – three “political blocs,” which, together with Siglaya, formed the political party, Akbayan, in January 1998. From small-scale, barangay-based development projects, the “popdems,” Bisig and Pandayan and allied POs/NGOs soon moved on to “integrated area development” (IAD) or “sustainable IAD” (SIAD) projects covering much wider areas. In pursuing these projects, the new left groups and allied POs/NGOs increasingly had to deal with barangay and municipal LGUs, coordinate with them, and eventually work on joint projects with them. Thus, the IAD/SIAD experience eventually led to greater PO/NGO and LGU interaction. From development work, the emergent left groups and allied POs/NGOs moved on – naturally, as it were – to greater engagement in both local governance and local government work, and they developed a different concept of “governance.” Several developments facilitated this process. The most important was the passage of the Local Government Code of 1991, which provided for decentralization and the transfer of power to local governments. Another was that international donor agencies provided funds and new ideas for PO/NGO participation in local governance.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Ricardo Reyes, 3 November 2003, Quezon City.

<sup>35</sup> Rocamora 2000a, p. 4.

The Local Government Code has been praised as a “landmark” piece of legislation<sup>36</sup> and “a revolution in governance.”<sup>37</sup> Despite her elitist background, President Aquino had pushed hard for decentralization, the most important policy departure of her entire administration, wanting it to be part of her legacy of democratization. For several years, the LGC bill languished in Congress. It was only towards the end of Aquino’s term that the LGC was enacted. Hoping to gain her crucial endorsement for their electoral bids, Congress members rushed to have it approved.<sup>38</sup>

In what has been described as “one of the most ambitious decentralization attempts in Asia”,<sup>39</sup> the Code devolved to local governments the responsibility for the delivery of basic services as well as certain regulatory and licensing powers; increased their share in taxes; and provided various incentives for local governments to become more entrepreneurial.<sup>40</sup> In just four years, 70,000 national government employees were transferred to local organizational structures, and the share of local governments in internal revenue allotment increased from 11 to 40 per cent. “The decentralization programme has proceeded steadily, if not always smoothly,” assesses Mark Turner, “and there are certainly indications that real gains have been made in promoting local autonomy and enabling local government to run more of their own affairs in cooperation with NGOs and the private sector.”<sup>41</sup> Others have even been more praiseful. “Perhaps nowhere else in the world,” gushes a panel of scholars, “has decentralization of the political system proceeded as rapidly as in the Philippines.”<sup>42</sup>

In the Latin American experience, decentralization did not necessarily involve the democratization of local governments. “If a local government is already democratic and responsive to its citizens,” Jonathan Fox observed, “then the outcome is promising. If not, then decentralization can reinforce patronage politics or even authoritarian rule at the local level. Some decentralization programs create new concentrations of elite power while others actually do decentralize control. But despite these diverse outcomes, decentralization did

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<sup>36</sup> Eaton 2001, pp. 114.

<sup>37</sup> Rood 1998, p.

<sup>38</sup> Eaton 2001, pp. 116-8.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p 106.

<sup>40</sup> Brillantes 1996, p. 87.

<sup>41</sup> Turner 1999b, p. 118.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.aasianst.org/absts/1997abst/seasia/sea82.htm>. The panel of “Session 82” on “Decentralization and Democracy: Exploring the Linkages in the Philippines,” consisting of Gary Hawes, Emil Bolongaita, Paul Hutchcroft, John Thayer Sidel and

pave the way for left victories at the local and regional levels.”<sup>43</sup> In theory, at least, the decentralization program in the Philippines provides better conditions for the left since it includes some democratization features. The Code not only devolved certain powers of the national government to local governments; it also introduced some forms of direct democracy, as well as the participation of POs/NGOs in local special bodies, such as the local development councils and the bids and awards committees.<sup>44</sup> “Decentralization,” wrote Alex Brillantes, Jr., “is a modality of democratization, ... a major strategy to empower the previously marginalized sectors of society.”<sup>45</sup> A “rapid field appraisal” of decentralization conducted by the Associates in Rural Development Inc. in 1996 noted growing popular participation in local governance.<sup>46</sup>

The initial reaction to the Code from the left and from the PO/NGO community was far from enthusiastic. Many POs/NGOs were indifferent. Others dismissed it as just another medium for state cooptation, providing only token representation for marginalized groups.<sup>47</sup> POs/NGOs had achieved some successes in their development work, while corruption, patronage and bureaucratic red tape had blunted development efforts of local governments. Why bother to work with local governments?<sup>48</sup> A different view, however, surfaced within the emergent left. Pandayan peasant leader Vic Fabe saw opportunities for much more grassroots organizing and mobilization against abuses of local officials.<sup>49</sup> Men Sta. Ana, then executive secretary of the Freedom from Debt Coalition, argued that the LGC was ‘a forceful instrument to change the political power equation’ and ‘a powerful tool for people’s organizations to carry out their political and development agenda on the ground’. He warned, however, that if the Code would be implemented without people’s participation, the elite and the *trapos* could exploit it to consolidate their political and economic turfs. He urged POs/NGOs to take into account the Code’s import on the struggle for local power ... and to ‘slug it out’.<sup>50</sup> For Bisig, the LGC provided an opening for POs/NGOs to participate actively in local special bodies, including such important bodies as the local development council. Bisig eyed the possibility

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Nereus Acosta, in the 1997 Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>43</sup> Fox 1995, p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> Pimentel 1994, pp. 93-5.

<sup>45</sup> Brillantes 1994, p. 584.

<sup>46</sup> Turner 1999b, p. 112.

<sup>47</sup> Villarin 1996, pp. 1-2.

<sup>48</sup> Soriano 1992, p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> Fabe 1992, p. 84.

<sup>50</sup> Santa Ana 1992, pp. 3, 9.

of achieving immediate tangible gains at the grassroots level by combining collective action of POs and work within local government structures.<sup>51</sup>

Through 1992, POs/NGOs, especially those in the CODE-NGO, took active part in regional consultations and a national PO/NGO conference on local governance. The participating POs/NGOs, including many aligned with ND and SD groups, formed the National Coordinating Council on the Local Government Code, a broad coalition of 23 national PO/NGO networks. Endorsing the Code, the conference participants took up the challenge of active partnership with local governments. To counter moves of some officials to do away with the Code's basic PO/NGO empowering provisions, the participants called upon the government to ensure the full implementation of the Code.<sup>52</sup> In the first few years of the implementation of the Code, the Council actively campaigned among member as well as non-member POs/NGOs to get themselves accredited with local governments and to take active part in local governance. According to Villarin, however, the initial participation of POs/NGOs in governance was mainly at the regional and national levels and consisted mostly of "conferences and media-hugging activities praising NGO-LGU partnerships."<sup>53</sup>

### ***The Left and Barangay Governance***

In November 1996, seven NGOs closely identified with the "popdems," Bisig, Pandayan and Siglaya decided to work together in assisting PO leaders in the NGOs' respective project areas who were intending to run in the May 1997 barangay elections by providing them with trainings on electoral campaign management.<sup>54</sup> Many of those who took part in the trainings did win.<sup>55</sup> The newly-elected barangay leaders asked the NGOs' help in running their barangays. In a conference convened by the IPG, the nine NGOs that participated agreed to conduct trainings on barangay governance. They soon produced a Barangay

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<sup>51</sup> Valte 1992, p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> Villarin 1996, pp. 7-10; electronic communication with Maritona Labajo, former secretary-general of Akbayan and former program officer of CODE-NGO, 8 August 2003.

<sup>53</sup> Villarin 2000, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Bulatao 2000b, p. 191. The seven NGOs were: Center for Agrarian Reform and Transformation (Caret), Education for Life Foundation (ELF), Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD), Institute of Politics and Governance (IPG), Kaisahan Tungo sa Kaunlaran ng Kanayunan at Repormang Pansakahan (Kaisahan), Popular Education for People Empowerment, Inc. (PEPE) and Sentro ng Alternatibong Lingap Panligal (Saligan).

<sup>55</sup> According to Patrick I. Patiño, the NGOs identified with what later became the "Batman Consortium" supported over 600 candidates for barangay posts in 1997. Half of

Administration Training Manual (Batman) and used this for initial trainings.<sup>56</sup> Many other newly-elected barangay officials expressed interest in the “Batman” trainings and joined in. Meanwhile, members of the nine NGOs became actively involved in the formal establishment of Akbayan and subsequently in the party’s campaign to win seats in Congress through the party-list elections in 1998. In the course of conducting Batman trainings, the NGOs involved realized that barangay governance – and local governance, in general – had a lot more training needs. Thus, the Batman program became a much bigger and longer-term program. The consortium of NGOs involved in local governance endeavors officially became the Barangay-Bayan Governance Consortium in 1999, but its comic-book nickname stuck. Since the original Batman trainings, the NGOs involved in the ‘Batman Consortium’ have developed other training courses, such as the Basic Orientation Barangay Governance (BOBG) for barangay officials and community PO leaders, the provincial-level Barangay Governance Trainors’ Training, and the Direct Action for Local Governance Seminar (Dialogs), an orientation seminar on the Local Government Code for NGO-PO-LGU partners. The crowning achievement of the consortium, however, has been the Barangay Development Planning through Participatory Resource Appraisal (BDP-PRA), which promotes active community involvement in the local development planning process.<sup>57</sup>

Tomasito Villarin, IPG executive director, and Rocamora, Akbayan president in 2001-3 and currently IPD executive director, describe the BDP-PRA process. Prior to the actual planning in BDP-PRA, the Batman NGO trains PO leaders and LGU officials as local community facilitators in an intensive one-week course. This trainers’ training ends with the formation of PRA teams, which take charge of undertaking the planning process, each team consisting of a facilitator, a documenter and a process observer. The BDP-PRA proper begins with social or community preparation; then moves on to data gathering and analysis, problem prioritization, the setting of the community vision, mission, goals and strategies, and the writing up of a draft five-year development plan; and concludes with the formal adoption of the plan by the barangay council.<sup>58</sup> The BDP-PRA process involves “poverty mapping, [i.e.] identifying the poor in

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the candidates for barangay captain (92 out of 182) and over a third of the candidates for barangay councilor (180 out of 450) won. See Patiño 1997, p. 14.

<sup>56</sup> Villarin 2003, p. 3. The two additional NGOs were Labor Education and Research Network (LEARN) and Small Economic Enterprises Development, Inc. (SEED).

<sup>57</sup> Villarin 2003, p. 4; Rocamora 2000a, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Villarin 2004, pp. 20-23.



the barangay, and analyzing why they are poor.” This exercise serves to curb the infrastructure project orientation of most development planning in the Philippines.<sup>59</sup>

### Key Steps in the BDP-PRA Process

- 1) **Social preparation** – identifying local POs, NGOs, and other non-government stakeholders who are willing to participate in the BDP-PRA
- 2) **Community orientation** – during the barangay assembly, the local community is given an orientation about the project, what is its objective and relevance to them, etc.
- 3) **Data-gathering** – through PRA, community facilitators trained earlier will get community data (demographics, socio-economic, historical, etc.)
- 4) **Data analysis and interpretation** – community designs a problem tree based on the data gathered
- 5) **Problem prioritization** – process whereby participants reason out and argue which problems will be prioritized based on criteria they set
- 6) **Cross-sector validation** – comparative discussions of the problems posed by the different sectoral groups of the BDP-PRA
- 7) **Community vision-mission setting** – a highly graphic and visual process of defining what the community would like to be 10 years from the present
- 8) **Goals and objectives setting** – problem tree is made into an objective tree; a community goal is defined and specific objectives are identified
- 9) **Identifying indicators of development** – each set of objectives will have indicators that are qualitative, quantitative, and time-bound
- 10) **Strategy formulation** – community defines what strategies to pursue usually after doing an external and internal environmental scanning
- 11) **Comprehensive five-year development and annual investment/operations planning** – five sectoral groups under the BDP/MDP standard format define these plans
- 12) **Plan presentation with the barangay assembly** – the packaged plans are presented to the barangay assembly for approval
- 13) **Approval and formal adoption of the plan by the *sanggunian*** – a formal resolution is passed by the legislative council and later, an ordinance adopting the plans will be adopted
- 14) **Setting up the monitoring and evaluation system** – training of the barangay development council and the municipal technical working group on how to establish a project monitoring and evaluation system.

(Source: Villarin, Tomasito S. 2004, “Finding Meaning in Local Governance through Popular Participation at the Barangay-Bayan,” in *Beyond Good Governance: Participatory Democracy in the Philippines*, ed. Marisol Estrella and Nina Iszatt (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy), p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> Rocamora 2000a, p. 4.

BDP-PRA is a Philippine adaptation of an approach in participatory development planning known as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), which spread in many countries of the South in the 1990s. In PRA, local people undertake their own appraisal and analysis. They make maps and models, walk transects and observe, investigate and interview, score and diagram, present and analyze information, and plan. It contrasts with traditional methods of inquiry, which tend to impose and extract. “[W]hen it is well done,” Robert Chambers notes, “local people, and especially the poorer, enjoy the creative learning that comes from presenting their knowledge and their reality. They say that they see things differently. It is not just that they share knowledge with outsiders. They themselves learn more of what they know, and together present and build up more than any one knew alone. The process is then empowering, enabling them to analyze their world and can lead into their planning and action.” Compared with data taken through traditional means, information shared by local people through PRA have been marked by “high validity and reliability.”<sup>60</sup>

Usually, BDP-PRA includes planning for raising barangay funds and actual fund-raising as well. “Because the barangay budget is almost always inadequate,” Rocamora explains, “the development plan includes a strategy for accessing additional funds. Batman assists the process with a pilot project to provide a seed fund of P100,000 (US\$2500) which can be accessed by the barangay only if they manage to generate funds from other sources. Batman also assists by organizing ‘pledging sessions’ where higher level government officials and ODA [official development aid] and other foreign funding agencies are brought together to listen to barangay officials make a pitch for financial support for their projects.”<sup>61</sup>

Still other programs of the Batman Consortium are the women in governance training program, electoral and political education, and organizational development and strengthening. Thanks to the women in governance trainings, an increasing number of Batman POs/NGOs have developed and integrated gender-focused programs in their local governance work.<sup>62</sup> The consortium also engages in policy advocacy at local and national

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<sup>60</sup> Chambers 1994, pp. 1253-68.

<sup>61</sup> Rocamora 2000a, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> Sumaylo 2004, p. 221.

levels, such as campaigning for community-based anti-poverty programs and for strengthening the Local Government Code.<sup>63</sup>

By 2000, the member NGOs of Batman had increased to 35, mostly local NGOs. The following year, however, the consortium suffered a serious setback, as Gerardo Bulatao, a leading and influential member of both Akbayan and the consortium, withdrew from both in the wake of the controversial elections for party-list candidates at the 2001 Akbayan congress. Together with several supporters, he established a new NGO, Empowering Civic Participation in Governance (ECPG). Moreover, he convinced a good number of NGOs to withdraw from the Batman consortium and to set up a new consortium, Local Governance Citizens' Network (LGCNet).<sup>64</sup> Both consortiums have grown since then. By the end of 2003, the Batman Consortium's membership roster included 60 NGOs and three national POs. The Batman NGOs have worked in more than 2,500 of the country's 45,000 barangays, of which 1,200 have undertaken BDP-PRA. The 2,500 barangays are spread out in 28 of the country's 79 provinces, 167 of 1,496 municipalities and 16 of 83 cities.<sup>65</sup>

Akbayan is the lone political party in the Batman consortium.<sup>66</sup> Akbayan's involvement in Batman marks the first, and thus far, the only major engagement of a left party in local governance – open, legal, and not “underground” governance – since the late 1930s and early 1940s.

### ***Assessing Batman's Work at the Barangay Level***

Rocamora describes Batman as a governance and development project of Philippine POs/NGOs whose goal was to set into motion a series of political activities at the barangay level that would enable elected barangay officials to make full use of the Local Government Code in providing economic and political services to their constituents; maximize economic gains for barangay inhabitants; and strengthen local communities and increase their capability to negotiate their economic and political relations with the larger society. He saw it as a means to change a patronage-permeated political culture. According to him, public goods and services in the prevailing “currency” of political relationships are transacted privately – politicians provide jobs, money, etc. to individuals who

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<sup>63</sup> Villarín 2004, p. 15.

<sup>64</sup> ECPG, founded in August 2001, now assists ABA-AKO and Alab-Katipunan in their development work. Established in October 2001, LGCNet was formally incorporated in August 2002 with 42 member NGOs.

<sup>65</sup> Villarín 2004, p. 8; Rocamora 2004, p. 335.

give their political support in turn. With a strengthened barangay governance system, relations between barangay leaders and municipal-level politicians could take on the elements of negotiation and “the introduction of another mode of relations with municipal elites should, over time, erode personalism and move local politics from exchanges of private goods to exchanges of public goods.”<sup>67</sup>

Villarin highlights Batman’s role in promoting “democratic participation in governance,” portraying Batman as “a movement of NGOs, people’s organizations, political blocs, progressive local government officials and a progressive reform electoral party promoting good governance through participatory approaches in local governance.” He contends that “governance is essentially an issue of power,” and that democratic participation in governance is “a collective effort of citizens to negotiate from the state rights already mandated but effectively denied them because of an imbalance in power relations” and “an attempt to change certain institutional arrangements, power relations and hierarchical structures.”<sup>68</sup>

Preliminary findings of an assessment of the impact of Batman interventions in local politics point to creditable gains in the promotion of both participatory democracy and development at the barangay level. Hawes cites the following “rather remarkable impacts” of the Batman approach:

- Residents have begun to more fully understand their rights as citizens and to engage in oversight of the local governments.
- More importantly, citizens have also demonstrated that they recognize their responsibility for improving local governance by volunteering their time and talent.
- Local government elected officials are beginning to acknowledge that they are accountable downward to the community rather than upward to their political bosses and allies.
- The very limited resources available at the local level are increasingly being invested in priority projects identified by the community that address local needs for better services and improved livelihoods. Most notably, prestige projects such as basketball courts, barangay halls, and waiting sheds that bear the

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<sup>66</sup> Villarin 2000, p. 29.

<sup>67</sup> Rocamora 2000a, pp. 5-6.

<sup>68</sup> Villarin 2000, p. 1-4.

names of the elected officials are seldom identified as high priorities when planning and budgeting are done in a participatory fashion with high levels of community involvement.

- The best local governments are also beginning to realize that if they want to improve service delivery they must have community participation in agenda setting and in the implementation of projects. This collaboration mobilizes additional labor and contributions from the community that multiply the impact and extend the reach of what ever could have been accomplished without citizen participation.<sup>69</sup>

While Batman has made considerable progress in furthering participatory democracy, it does have some weaknesses. One crucial weak spot is popular political education, particularly in fostering greater awareness of how patronage politics directly affects the lives of barangay residents and how it can be combated. Despite greater popular participation in local governance in areas covered by the program, clientelist thinking and behavior have persisted or even continued to hold sway. This has been most apparent at election time. In many Batman areas, non-*trapos* still fared badly against *trapos* in the 1998 and 2001 polls, as residents continued to behave and vote as before. Most telling for me, however, was that in most Batman barangays I visited in 2002,<sup>70</sup> vote-buying during the barangay elections was just as bad as in previous elections, or worse. My field visits did confirm that Batman has helped barangay leaders become more resourceful and enterprising in raising funds for their projects, especially through the “pledging sessions.” I observed, however, that staffers of Batman NGOs had not gone on to explain “moving local politics from exchanges of private goods to exchanges of public goods.” A bit of patronage politics thus managed to creep back in, as municipal, provincial and national officials approached for “pledges” were quick to use the opportunity to grandstand and to try to make funding beneficiaries feel indebted for the grace bestowed on them. To change power relations even at the local level, “people’s participation in governance” apparently needs to be complemented by an ideological and cultural struggle against patronage politics.

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<sup>69</sup> Hawes 2000, p. 20.

<sup>70</sup> I visited ten Batman barangays in Banaybanay, Governor Generoso, Surallah, Jagna and Daraga.

Another weakness has been the delay in moving up to municipal and city governance. As its official name indicated, the Batman Consortium's work was supposed to be scaled up from the barangay to the *bayán* (municipal) level. It took some time, however, for the Batman consortium to do so. Batman's – and Akbayan's – engagement in local politics had centered on “democratic [or people's/citizens'] participation in governance.” Democratic participation in governance is in line with the objective of transforming an elite-dominated formal democracy into a more participatory and egalitarian one. Since governance lends itself best to direct people's participation at the barangay level, it was but fitting that Batman should start at this level. Those involved in Batman, upon seeing barangay residents actively involved in the day-to-day activities of the barangay, were very much buoyed up by its apparent success. Batman NGOs and Akbayan poured their energies into reaching out to as many barangays as possible and to achieving proficiency in participatory barangay governance. Absorbed in horizontal development, they on the whole kept postponing Batman's vertical development and forgot about the vacuum in political leadership at the municipal/city level. Another factor for the delay in scaling-up was that the Batman NGOs and Akbayan tended to be restricted by the Batman frame of democratic participation in governance, which had a particular emphasis on direct democracy. While perhaps adequate enough for barangay governance, it no longer sufficed for municipal/city governance, where one already had to reckon with a civil bureaucracy and with much more of representative democracy.

Despite the above weaknesses, Batman has not slipped into the pitfall of “localism” that seems to have beset PRA projects in some developing countries. Mohan and Stokke, while viewing PRA as a positive trend in development theory and practice, warn of the tendencies to essentialise and romanticise ‘the local’ and to detach it from broader economic and political structures.<sup>71</sup> Akbayan and the POs/NGOs involved in Batman and BDP-PRA have managed to avoid localism because of their involvement in social movements and in the state arena (elections and governance) at various levels – local to national.

### ***The Left and Municipal/City Governance***

In 1997, while other Batman NGOs focused their energies on trainings on participatory barangay governance and development planning, the Institute for

Political and Electoral Reform (IPER), an NGO aligned with Siglaya and later Padayon, pioneered in trainings on *municipal* governance and development planning. Municipal officials in pilot areas were greatly satisfied with the trainings. Due to financial constraints, however, IPER could not sustain the initiative and had to suspend it indefinitely in 2000.<sup>72</sup>

Although there were some left or “progressive” candidates at the municipal and city levels who made it in 1998 and 2001,<sup>73</sup> the left parties and groups did not attend to them upon their assumption of office as much as the parties did to winning congressional candidates in 1998 and 2001 and as Akbayan did to winning barangay candidates in 1997 and 2002. When I did my field research in April–November 2002, it seemed to me that as far as government work at the municipal/city level was concerned, not much had changed since the PnB period. As in 1988, the post-PnB left parties (e.g., Akbayan, Sanlakas, Bayan Muna) took a stance of non-engagement or minimal involvement in municipal/city governance. I observed that left or “progressive” municipal/city officials were largely left to their own devices in performing their governmental functions. In some places, local structures of left parties – such as Akbayan’s divisions in the Iranun areas of Maguindanao; in southeastern Samar; and in Daraga, Albay; and Bayan Muna’s chapter in Davao City – did endeavor to become much more engaged in municipal/city governance. Until then, none of the left parties or groups had come up with a national program or orientational framework on municipal/city governance similar to that of Batman’s/Akbayan’s on barangay governance.

Local leaders and members of left parties tended to treat “progressive” municipal/city officials – even those who had already joined the party – not as fellow party members or as potential recruits but simply as allies, usually approaching them only to ask for some form of support for a mass action or campaign or for a PO/NGO project, or simply for humanitarian assistance. While the progressive officials grappled with such major municipal concerns as the revamp of a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy, improvement in the delivery of basic services, increasing municipal revenue, and comprehensive planning and budgeting, local leaders and members of left parties did not help them out. They were either too preoccupied with other concerns or they felt that municipal governance was out of their depth. Given that the progressive officials worked in

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<sup>71</sup> Mohan and Stokke 2000, p. 249.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Ramon Casiple, IPER executive director, 26 March 2002, in Quezon City.

<sup>73</sup> Some case studies are discussed in Chapter VII.

a *trapo*-dominated milieu and that many of them had in fact run under traditional parties, the left parties ran the great risk of losing these officials (or their main allegiance) to the traditional parties by default, as PnB had in the late 1980s.

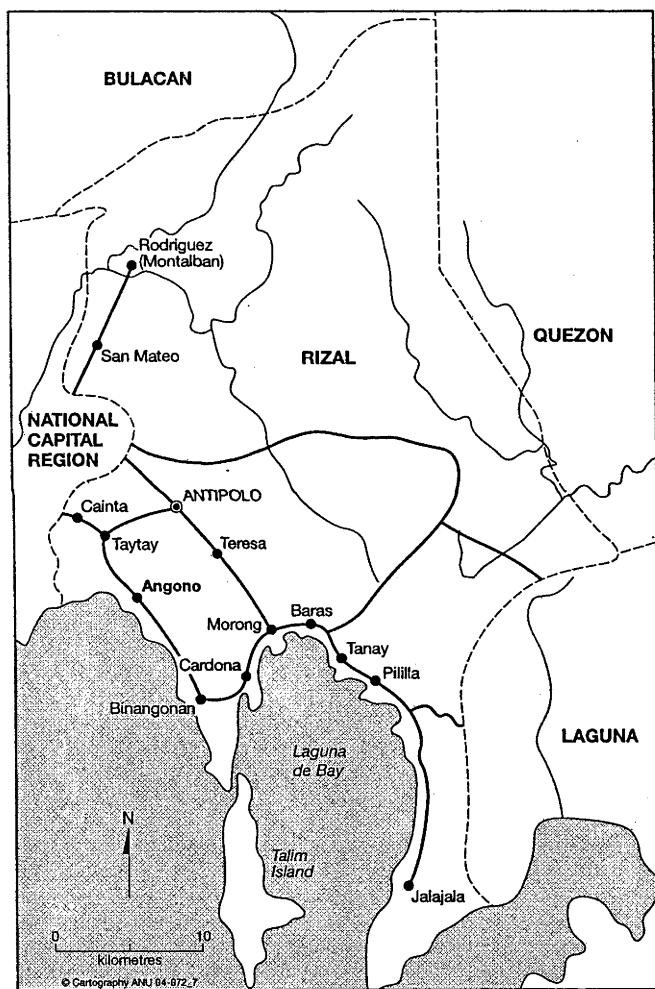
It must be borne in mind that the development of the ties between a left party and a “progressive” LGU official usually goes through a complicated process. Left party activists “spot” a progressive official or a potential ally in the course of interacting with him or her in connection with a mass campaign, a development project, participatory governance, etc. They then try to forge a closer relationship with him/her through frequent follow-up and by working with him on joint endeavors. The official usually belongs to a traditional party, but such affiliation does not prevent the left activists from working closely with him. Sometimes, the left party recruits the said official into the party, but he/she does not break off with the traditional party. In effect, the official has a double-party affiliation – traditional and left! Since left parties are commonly viewed as not having the wherewithal to win elections, he/she usually still runs in elections under one or the other traditional party. Thus far, none of the left electoral parties has stringently enforced single-party affiliation on politician-members.

Although Sanlakas/PM and Bayan Muna have a number of municipal/city officials, they remain largely uninvolved and unengaged in municipal/city governance. This is not because they want to boycott “bourgeois” municipal/city government institutions and processes. Municipal/city politics simply lies outside of their current priorities. It appears that for both Sanlakas/PM and Bayan Muna, Congress (through the party-list system) is more important as it serves as a much more powerful medium for political proselytization. In April 2002-January 2003, I visited Angono, Rizal, a municipality whose mayor was a member of Sanlakas, and Guinobatan, Albay, a municipality whose mayor was a member of Bayan Muna. Both mayors seemed to be performing very well in public office, but neither Sanlakas nor Bayan Muna seemed to be that much involved or engaged in government work and governance.

While still vice-mayor, Gerardo Calderon observed that many painters and sculptors lived or often came over to Angono, a picturesque, foothills town along Laguna de Bay. He noted too that two acclaimed national artists had actually come from the town. When Calderon ran for mayor in 1998, he presented his vision of the “Angono dream” – turning the municipality into “an artists’ paradise and a tourists’ haven” through a “holistic concept of local



governance anchored on LGU-NGO partnership.” Running under the Nationalist People’s Coalition (NPC), he won by a slim margin. Under Calderon’s leadership, the new municipal government immediately carried out improvements in infrastructure and service delivery and promoted the cultural development of Angono. It extended various forms of support to artists of various fields – painting, music, sculpture, native artistic traditions, etc. It undertook the identification and preservation of historical sites, as well as the revival of colorful traditional celebrations. Calderon promoted people’s participation in governance, regularly holding consultations with local neighborhood associations



**Map of Rizal province, showing Angono.**

and organizations of tricycle drivers, fisherfolk, women, artists, etc. Soon, Angono was winning awards for “outstanding municipal peace and order, and “cleanest and greenest” municipality in the entire province. With much increased revenues, Angono was promoted to “first class municipality” in 2001. Calderon won reelection in 2001 by a wide margin. When I visited Angono in 2002, I was

surprised to find a tidy little town with art shops, galleries and ateliers, as well as restaurants with different types of cuisine. Calderon personally brought me to an area that was being turned into a forest park, and, from a distance, he pointed out to me the site of a lakeside park being developed. In 2003, Angono's municipal government became one of the recipients of the national Galing Pook awards. The Galing Pook Foundation, which gives out the awards in recognition of outstanding achievements in local governance, cited Calderon and his colleagues for turning Angono's potential as an "artists' haven" into a reality.

With its base among the workers of Yupangco Cotton Mills, Sanlakas vigorously campaigned for Calderon and his local slate in 1998. Sanlakas members watched closely the vote counting and guarded the ballot boxes overnight. Despite several power outages, they stayed put. Calderon acknowledges that had it not been for the vigilance and courage of the Sanlakas activists, he would have lost. Apart from Calderon, two other Sanlakas members, both candidates for councilor, were elected. Calderon also appointed some Sanlakas members to local government posts. Sanlakas was very supportive of Calderon's initiatives. Neither the local chapter nor the provincial committee of Sanlakas body, however, played much of a role in trying to shape the conduct of local governance in Angono. The members of the local chapter of Sanlakas were much more involved in the activities of the local chapter of KPML, the urban poor coalition. In 2001, both Sanlakas and PM supported Calderon and his local slate, but due to miscommunications, PM members did not campaign for two Sanlakas candidates for councilor, who nonetheless still won. After the elections, the engagement of Sanlakas/PM in local governance in Angono continued to be minimal.<sup>74</sup>

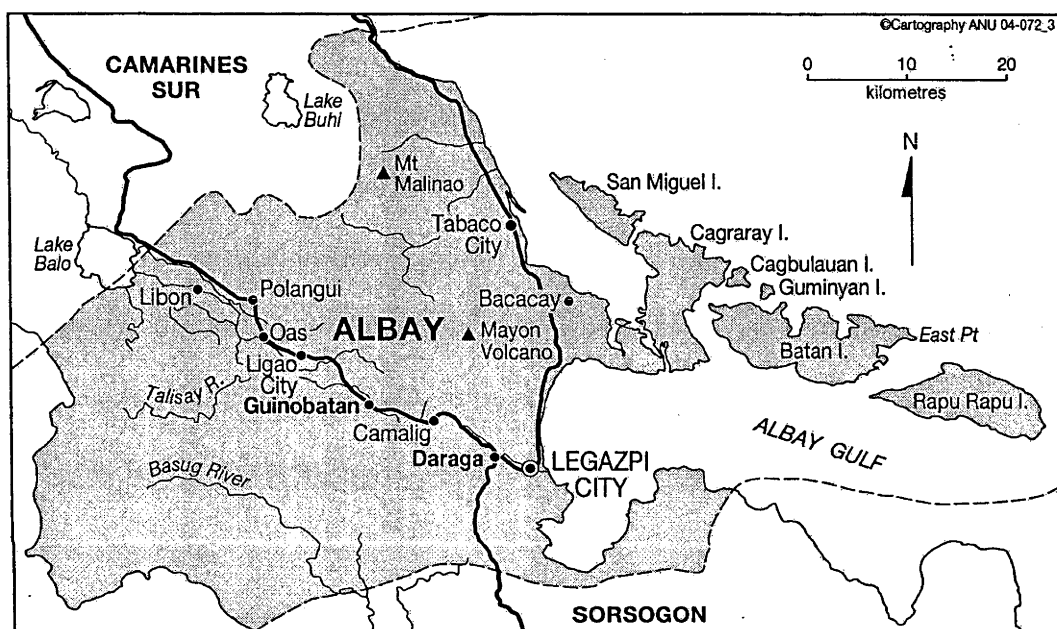
Bicol, where Guinobatan, Albay, is located is a region in which the CPP-NPA has been very adept at playing the "bourgeois" electoral game, e.g., supporting *trapos* that pay "revolutionary tax" or helping unseat *trapos* that have become too entrenched. It is also a region where the NPA has been most assiduous in enforcing PTC fees. Guinobatan, an inland municipality with a rugged terrain, is a well-known hotbed of CPP-NPA dissidence.

Belonging to a prominent family in Guinobatan, Christopher Flores was an ND student activist in the 1980s. After college, he took care of the family

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<sup>74</sup> Interviews with Gerardo Calderon, mayor, Angono, Rizal, 7 April 2002, in Angono; Bernardo Balagtas, artist and municipal councilor, Angono, 7 April 2002, in Angono; Lecifina Arce, former secretary, Rizal provincial committee, Sanlakas, 10 January 2003, in Quezon City; and Helen Bonga, former chairperson, Angono Multisectoral Organizations, 6 January 2003, in Angono.

business concerns. Although he ceased to be active in the ND movement, Flores remained sympathetic to it. Upon the prodding of his father, a judge, he entered local politics in 1995, running for municipal councilor, and won easily. While serving in the municipal government, Flores was appalled at the extent of the corruption within. He could not do much about it, as he and another councilor were just two in the opposition. Since 1956, two political families had controlled the town's politics. In 1998, Flores ran for mayor under Estrada's *Laban ng Makabayang Masang Pilipino* (LAMMP or Struggle of the Nationalist Filipino



Map of Albay province, showing Daraga and Guinobatan.

Masses), campaigning on a platform of good governance. Despite CPP-NPA support, Flores lost – by a mere 159 votes – in elections marked by extensive vote-buying and vote counting irregularities. In 2001, Flores tried again, this time running under Aksyon Demokratiko, and with the support of Bayan Muna, which had just been set up. He joined Bayan Muna and campaigned for it in the party-list vote. Once again, Flores carried a platform of good governance. The incumbent used the “red scare” against him, but this did not work. Flores won by a convincing margin.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Interviews with Christopher Flores, mayor, Guinobatan, Albay, 30 October 2002, in Quezon City; Wilber Francis Rontas, action officer, municipal disaster coordinating council, Guinobatan, 3 November 2002, in Guinobatan; Rodolfo Teope, businessman and former activist, 3 November 2002, in Guinobatan; and Rodrigo Realubit, former activist, 3 November 2002, in Guinobatan; Beth Oñate, member, management staff, office of the mayor, 4 November 2002, in Guinobatan.

Flores undertook a clean-up of the municipal government and tried to institute transparency. In the process, he unearthed various ghost projects and many other irregularities. He encountered stiff opposition from some municipal employees who remained very loyal to the previous administrations and considered him an “outsider.” Guinobatan came to have a new municipal development plan and comprehensive land-use plans, after over a decade of having none. These featured area development and economic integration of the highlands. Flores was particularly good at finance generation, managing to get funding for municipal projects from various government agencies and from Congress. He managed to pay off the P23 million debt accumulated by past administrations.

Bayan Muna had a chapter in Guinobatan, but it seemed unable to define clearly what it should be doing after elections. Although Flores and two councilors were members of Bayan Muna, it played no role in actual governance. Flores promoted people’s participation in governance, but only traditional civic organizations signed up for the municipal development council and other local special bodies. “We tried to get groups in the countryside to participate but they refused,” comments Flores wryly. “They did not want to register as they had to submit lists of their members.”<sup>76</sup> (In the “red zones,” the CPP-NPA organizes the peasants, women, youth, etc. into cells and groups that support the revolutionary movement, but these are, of course, of a clandestine nature.)

A negative point in Flores’ administration, however, was the unstable peace and order situation. At the time that I visited Guinobatan, two telecommunications firms had just shut down their operations there due to NPA harassment. For refusing to pay “revolutionary tax,” the NPA had killed the landowner of one firm’s relay station, and had attempted to blast the other firm’s tower. “Since Flores took over,” declares a local official who was very critical of the mayor, “there have been fourteen of such shooting incidents. The NPA collects monthly dues from big establishments in the town center, and it ‘asks’ five to ten per cent from contractors for projects implemented in the highlands. During elections, the NPA threatens voters and demands PTC – P15-20,000 from candidates for councilor, P50,000 for mayoral candidates. Because of all these, investors are reluctant to invest.”<sup>77</sup>

An exception to Bayan Muna’s non-involvement in municipal/city governance is Davao City, where the local chapter has been very much engaged in

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with Flores.

<sup>77</sup> Name of local official withheld, as divulging it could endanger his security.

the legislative and advocacy work of Councilor Angela Librado, one of only two “official” Bayan Muna candidates who won in the 2001 local elections. Librado has been very active in articulating the ND movement’s positions on various national and local issues – power price hikes, the government’s “war on terrorism,” US troops in Mindanao, women’s rights, globalization, etc.<sup>78</sup> It must be borne in mind, however, that Davao City is the Philippines’ third biggest metropolis (after Metro Manila and metropolitan Cebu) and is thus important as a center for political proselytization.

In its early years, Akbayan, just like Sanlakas/PM and Bayan Muna, did not engage much in municipal and city governance. Of late, however, it has taken the decisive step into serious engagement. In December 2002, Akbayan held the “First Political Meeting of Akbayan LGU Officials,” a conference attended by selected Akbayan municipal, city and provincial officials from different parts of the country. Akbayan’s national officials elucidated the party’s platform for change and good governance and its electoral framework. In turn, the LGU officials explained the main issues and concerns that confronted them in their respective municipalities, and the changes and reforms that they were working on. Since the conference served as a venue for discussion on scaling up participatory governance initiatives from the barangay to the municipal/city level, a good part of discussion dwelt on “citizen participation in local governance.”<sup>79</sup>

Since the December 2002 conference, Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs have become more involved and engaged in municipal/city government and governance concerns. To formulate a more comprehensive framework for the party’s engagement in local governance, Akbayan’s government affairs committee has endeavored to draw lessons from the pioneering efforts of the local chapters that had grappled with municipal/city governance in 1998-2002 – as well as individual LGU officials who were Akbayan members (as in Banaybanay, Governor Generoso, and Victoria).<sup>80</sup> A big help to Akbayan is that the Batman Consortium has now drawn up a more comprehensive framework for its engagement in local governance, one that goes beyond “democratic participation in governance” and addresses municipal and city governance more squarely. The consortium, for instance, is now designing programs on expanding

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Angela Librado, city councilor, Davao City, 17 July 2002, in Davao City.

<sup>79</sup> Minutes, First Political Meeting of Akbayan LGU Officials, 15-16 December, 2002, Quezon City.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Carmel Abao, chairperson, government affairs committee, Akbayan, 4 November 2003, in Quezon City.

“fiscal space” to assist municipal and city LGUs in coming up with innovative tax and non-tax revenue measures to beef up their limited resources. Among the programs are those for creating more self-liquidating public services such as public markets and potable water systems. The consortium is moving with more resolve into urban governance, putting stress on the role of the urban poor themselves. Looking even beyond the municipal level, the consortium is now also promoting “inter-LGU [inter-municipal] development cooperation programs using sustainable integrated area development models that tap common resource base like coastal waters, common topographical and environmental characteristics, and culture.”<sup>81</sup> As part of its efforts to learn from the experiences in participatory local governance in other countries, Akbayan sent a six-person delegation all the way to Brazil in February 2003 to study participatory local governance in several cities governed by the left-wing Workers’ Party (PT). The delegation, which included PO/NGO representatives as well as LGU officials, studied various aspects of local administration, e.g., participatory budget preparation, and tax administration and reform, and visited several local government projects, e.g. housing and river rehabilitation projects, and different NGOs.<sup>82</sup> It is much too early to assess the impact of Akbayan’s engagement in municipal/city government work, but one very noticeable result is that Akbayan’s LGU officials, many of whom tended to play down their links with the party before, now more openly identify themselves with it.<sup>83</sup>

### ***Contending Perspectives in Governance***

In his study on local politics and the left in Peru in the 1980s and early 1990s, Gerd Schönwälder notes the emergence of two clashing strategic perspectives of the Peruvian left’s involvement in local politics. The “revolutionary approach” held that the left should make local government serve mainly as a venue for ventilating popular demands, which were deemed “unfulfillable” under the existing order, to build a political movement capable of overthrowing the state. The “radical-democratic perspective” postulated that left intervention in local politics “should serve to demonstrate its capacity to govern within the existing political institutions while opening them up to popular

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<sup>81</sup> Villarin 2003, pp. 7-8, 18-20.

<sup>82</sup> *Bohol Sunday Post* 2002, p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Carmel Abao, chairperson, government affairs committee, Akbayan, 4 November 2003, in Quezon City.

participation from below.”<sup>84</sup> Schönwälder’s two strategic perspectives of the Peruvian left’s involvement in local politics correspond with two of what Roberts has described as the Latin American left’s three conceptions of democracy. Schönwälder’s “revolutionary approach” gibes with Roberts’ “instrumental view of democracy,” and the “radical-democratic perspective” is consistent with the “integral view of democracy.”

If Schönwälder’s categorization were to be applied to the Philippine situation, it can be said that Akbayan’s engagement in local politics hews to the radical-democratic perspective. That Akbayan does indeed take this perspective is beginning to be acknowledged.<sup>85</sup> The NDs can be said to take the revolutionary approach on the basis of using local governments, particularly at the barangay level, not really for ventilating popular demands, as Schönwälder puts it, but for “neutralizing” them and using them in other ways (gathering material support, intelligence work, etc.) in the service of the revolution. It is not clear where Sanlakas stands as there has not been much actual engagement in local government work – or not enough data about such engagement, at least. In the Philippine context, Schönwälder’s two strategic perspectives, as Roberts’ categories, can actually be applied to the left’s engagement in *government work and governance as a whole*, and not just to local government. Left parties like Bayan Muna adhere to an instrumental view of democracy and to a revolutionary approach to government work and governance, treating governmental institutions and processes mainly as instruments for furthering the revolution. In recognizing the intrinsic value of democratic institutions and in working for progressive and participatory governance, Akbayan has essentially taken an integral view of democracy and a radical-democratic perspective vis-a-vis government/governance.

By no means does the left have a monopoly of alternatives to the current “governance by patronage”<sup>86</sup> or “patrimonial approach” towards public office and governance of *trapos* who are associated with the Philippines’ oligarchic elite. Development specialists identified with the likes of the World Bank and advocates of “new public management” have been propagating a model in governance and development that puts emphasis on sound management to

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<sup>84</sup> Schönwälder 1998, pp. 76-7.

<sup>85</sup> Rocamora 2004, pp. 345-6. Some Akbayan members, who still consider themselves as revolutionaries, are not too keen in using the “revolutionary”-“radical democratic” dichotomy since they equate revolution with a process of radical transformation involving gradual changes as well as storms and ruptures.

<sup>86</sup> David 2004, p. 5.

produce an efficient, non-corrupt and accountable public administration.<sup>87</sup> The World Bank, the quintessential neoliberal institution, has changed its pitch from “less government” to “good governance.”<sup>88</sup> The “revisionist neoliberals” continue to emphasize market deregulation but now also put stress on institutional reforms and social development, with a special niche for the participation of “civil society.”<sup>89</sup> With the solid backing of Western donor organizations, the “new managerialism” has overwhelmingly dominated governance and development discourse in the Philippines – in the academe, in state institutions and in civil society. Books and articles extolling “best practices in local governance,”<sup>90</sup> as well as awards given out to model local governments promote the outlook and standards of the new managerialists on “good governance.”

In more recent years, revised neoliberal thinking in relation to governance has extended to, and suffused, the decentralization discourse. By decentralizing government, declared the World Bank, localization nourishes responsive and efficient government. In typical technocratic fashion, the Bank argued that the success of decentralization depended on its “design,” and equated successful decentralization with improved government efficiency and responsiveness and the “accommodation” of potentially explosive political forces. It encouraged the “harnessing” of civil society to bring about more effective and responsive governance.<sup>91</sup>

The term “governance” has traditionally been equated with “government,” i.e., the formal institutions of the state and the state’s coercive power.<sup>92</sup> In the last twenty years or so, however, “governance” has evolved. While *government* refers to “the institutions and agents charged with governing,” *governance* is now taken to mean “the modes and manner of governing.”<sup>93</sup> “Governance” is now used in many ways. “In developing countries,” notes Gerry Stoker, “governance has entered the policy arena. For the World Bank it is at times reduced to a commitment to efficient and accountable government. Others

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<sup>87</sup> Leftwich 1993, pp. 605-24; Desai and Imrie 1998, pp. 635-50.

<sup>88</sup> Tornquist 2002, p. 21.

<sup>89</sup> Mohan and Stokke 2000, p. 248.

<sup>90</sup> See, for instance, two books on “new public management” in a series entitled “East and Southeast Asia Network for Better Local Governments” published by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Local Government Development Foundation (Logodef) in 2000.

<sup>91</sup> World Bank 1999, pp. 107, 121-2.

<sup>92</sup> Stoker 1998, p. 17.

<sup>93</sup> See fn. 2.



use it more broadly ... to recognize the interdependence of public, private and voluntary sectors in developing countries.”<sup>94</sup>

In accord with their emerging radical democratic perspective, Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs have opted for the broader concept of governance. During the December 2002 conference of Akbayan LGU officials, one of the main discussants elaborated on governance as a relational concept – governance as a relationship between civil society and the state – and stressed the challenge for civil society to become more engaged in governance matters, as well as for local governments to increase their responsiveness.<sup>95</sup> A Batman workbook stated: “The interaction and cooperation of people’s organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector with government in crafting policies and in implementing programs define what governance is.”<sup>96</sup>

Giles Mohan and Kristian Stokke compare the “new” right (revised neoliberal) and “new” left (post-Marxist, e.g. radical democratic) conceptualizations of development. (In the main, the comparison actually holds true for the two perspectives’ conceptualization of governance as well.) Both the new right and the new left believe that “states or markets cannot and should not be solely responsible for ensuring social equality and welfare growth” and that organizations of civil society, particularly at the local level, can and should play a role. The revised neoliberal model, however, is a “top-down” approach, merely geared to increase the efficiency and accountability of government institutions. Moreover, it adheres to a “harmony model of power,” which envisages the empowerment of the powerless as coming about even without really touching the power of the powerful. The new left position is the opposite. “The radical notion of empowerment,” write Mohan and Stokke, “focuses on ‘bottom-up’ social mobilization in society as a challenge to hegemonic interests within the state and the market ... Power is conceptualised in relational and conflictual terms. Hence, empowerment of marginalized groups requires a structural transformation of economic and political relations towards a radically democratised society.”<sup>97</sup>

Like many other developing countries, the Philippines has had well over a decade of the revisionist neoliberal prescriptions on “good governance” and “new public management.” Despite tremendous financial backing from Western donor institutions, however, the revisionist neoliberal paradigm on governance has

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<sup>94</sup> Stoker 1998, p. 18.

<sup>95</sup> Minutes, First Political Meeting of Akbayan LGU Officials, 15-16 December, 2002, Quezon City.

<sup>96</sup> Institute for Strategic Initiatives and Institute of Politics and Governance 2002, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> Mohan and Stokke 2000, p. 249.

been an abject failure. The persistence – or rather, the worsening – of corruption and plunder, of oligarchic patrimonialism and bossism attests to this. The Philippines’ elite-dominated democracy allows for a number of revisionist neoliberal state reformists to exist in a sea of *trapos*. There will always be some of the *Galing Pook* type – honest public servants managing isles of state efficiency, transparency and accountability. Once their three terms<sup>98</sup> are up, however, it’s back to *trapos* again. Why? There is no reform-oriented party to carry on what they started. The new managerialists do not challenge the traditional parties, the convenient instruments of the oligarchy for patronage and patrimonialism. Almost all of them, in fact, are members of traditional parties. While many of the new managerialists (e.g., the “young Turks” in the Liberal Party) have earnestly tried to reform the traditional parties, their efforts have always come to naught as the *trapos* are too well-entrenched. They have often ended up condoning the patrimonialists’ behavior or being swallowed up by the system. The *trapos* welcome the neoliberal state reformists as it is good for the former’s own image to be seen in the latter’s company. The traditional parties woo the do-gooders and, once they do get them, put them on show windows as the poster children for good governance.

Revisionist neoliberalism may not work, but it poses great problems for Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs. Akbayan’s framework vis-à-vis government work and governance, while clearly moving towards a radical democratic perspective, has not taken full shape. A crucial missing element is a sharp delineation between Akbayan’s framework and the revised neoliberal perspective. Akbayan members have often mouthed such terms as good governance, civil society, people’s participation in governance, transparency and accountability – which just happen to be the favorite buzzwords of revisionist neoliberals – without making a clear distinction between its and the neoliberals’ concepts of these. Thus, to some extent at least, Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs have played right into the revisionist neoliberals’ hands. It is no wonder that Western donor agencies promoting the revised neoliberal agenda have been most willing to fund seminars and trainings on “good governance” and “people’s participation in governance.” Akbayan has started to recognize the dangers in not drawing a clear delineation. “[W]ithout consciousness of the distinction,” states Rocamora, “the danger of cooptation or the related pitfall of opportunism, of being used while taking money from neo-liberal local governance projects is great. At the same

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<sup>98</sup> By law, local officials are limited to a maximum of three three-year terms for the same position.

time, it will be difficult to identify areas of convergence with reformers who may operate within a neo-liberal frame but who work on projects such as anti-corruption, which is a common concern. Finally, without discourse maps for navigating the white waters of local governance discourse, we cannot maximize the empowerment potential of local governance projects such as the BBGC.”<sup>99</sup>

For Akbayan, forging alliances with state reformists should not be too hard. The much bigger challenge is recruiting state reformists and eventually securing not just their main, but their sole, party allegiance. Akbayan has been moving deeper into a milieu (local politics) in which the revisionist neoliberal perspective has a much stronger influence than the radical democratic perspective. Unless it makes a sharp distinction between the two, Akbayan may end up, in most cases, helping prepare the LGU officials attending its seminars and trainings for conversion to revisionist neoliberalism, which, after all, provides certain perquisites. Apart from the being backed by many donor agencies, revisionist neoliberalism, Philippine-style, affords politicians the convenience of joining a traditional patronage party, switching parties and coalitions every so often, and availing of the support of powerful clans and personages.

### ***Counter-hegemony in the State Arena***

Left parties and groups in the Philippines have moved, in varying degrees, from non-engagement to engagement in government work and governance. They have tangled with *trapos* aligned with the oligarchic elite. They have worked closely with state reformists. They have forged tactical alliances with sections of the *trapo* community or even the ruling coalition in certain situations, e.g., putting state reformists in important government positions. Responding, again in varying degrees, to two developments that have had a major impact on government work and governance in the post-authoritarian era – coalition politics and government decentralization – the left groups seized upon the opportunities opened to further their revolutionary or radical democratic ends. In the process, however, they have exposed themselves to the dangers of being manipulated or coopted not just by *trapos* but also by revisionist neoliberals, and have at times, in fact, been used by them.

While Philippine decentralization has provided for openings for popular participation in governance, left groups have to take well into account its actual

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<sup>99</sup> Rocamora 2004, p. 332.

impact, overall, in furthering democratization. Summarizing several initial assessments of the Local Government Code vis-a-vis popular participation, Rood noted in 1998 that the Code had advanced democracy at the local level, produced a mindset promoting participation, enhanced the legitimacy of political action by NGOs and increased the participation of women in governance.<sup>100</sup> Gary Hawes observes that with LGUs acquiring a major share of the total government revenues and greater control over natural resources and over local development planning, the Code has introduced 'a radical redistribution in the control over vital resources'. Despite predictions of many that this redistribution would only foster a new generation of local bosses, most LGUs were acting responsibly in utilizing their new powers and resources. He cites a much-better-informed public as one reason for this behavior. Analyzing the structural impact of the Code, Hawes enthuses that it has brought about 'a dramatic change in intergovernmental relations [that] is further breaking down the clientelistic basis of Philippine politics'.<sup>101</sup>

There are, however, more circumspect voices. 'Despite the profusion of NGOs and POs over the past fifteen years,' writes Hutchcroft, 'they still have a long way to go before they can be considered to have significant and lasting influence on the conduct of local government and politics. Despite their successes on particular fronts and in particular localities, the cumulative impact of these nontraditional actors is decidedly weak in comparison to the formidable networks of power enjoyed by the traditional structures that they are confronting.'<sup>102</sup> Eaton reports that after approving the Code, legislators have attempted "to reverse and then circumvent decentralization since it threatened their status as brokers claiming personal credit for negotiating fiscal transfers from the center."<sup>103</sup> He also says that traditional actors in Philippine political society have consistently and effectively moved to undermine new participatory roles for NGOs and to sideline them from the policy-making process.<sup>104</sup>

As the Batman experience has shown, the Local Government Code has given a tremendous boost to people's participation in governance. But the deepening of democracy in the Philippines requires much more than elements of participatory governance. In terms of breaking elite rule, the Code has barely scratched the surface. The surest sign that democratization of local politics

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<sup>100</sup> Rood 1998, pp. 129-30.

<sup>101</sup> Hawes 2000, pp 3-4, 21.

<sup>102</sup> Hutchcroft 1998b, p. 40.

<sup>103</sup> Eaton 2001, p. 101.

<sup>104</sup> Eaton 2003, pp. 470-1.

indeed still has a long way to go is that traditional parties of patronage and patrimonialism are the ruling entities in *almost all* of the country's municipalities, cities and provinces. POs/NGOs may now have gotten a say in local governance in a good number of areas, but, at the end of the day, *trapos* still call the shots.

The deepening of democratization in the Philippines may hinge a lot on which approach towards government/governance eventually gains predominance: the currently dominant "patrimonial approach" of the oligarchic elite or one of the alternatives – revised neoliberal, revolutionary or radical democratic. As an alternative to the "patrimonial approach," the revolutionary approach seems to constitute a dead end. Left parties that gain the reins of local government cannot keep blaming the national government for local ills, nor keep promising a substantial or appreciable improvement in the people's livelihoods after some far-off or indeterminate victory of the "revolution." The Peruvian experience has shown that "leftist local governments cannot escape responsibility for governing, that is, they cannot forgo the difficult task of trying to find workable solutions for the urgent needs of the popular majorities within the framework of the existing political institutions."<sup>105</sup> At the national level, it is conceivable that revolutionary proselytization and mobilization could indeed hasten the dawning of a revolutionary situation. For as long as lower classes, marginalized groups and their allies have not broken the ideological and cultural domination of the oligarchic elite, however, the latter will continue to maintain its hold on economic and political power. The political upheavals of February 1986 and January 2001 that ousted Marcos and Estrada, respectively, were indeed "people power" uprisings, yet they installed elite-dominated regimes.

With the initial achievements and gains made in congressional work, as well as in LGU work and governance at the barangay, municipal and city levels, there is reason for some optimism in the prospects of the emergent radical democratic perspective. To an appreciable extent, adherents of this perspective (e.g., Akbayan) have indeed been able to promote popular empowerment as well as to bring about concrete improvements in the people's well-being, especially at the grassroots level. However, if Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs want to be much more effective in their efforts towards bringing about radical political and social change, a lot more needs to be done. Leftists in government, working closely with leftists in civil society, would have to bring the fight against elite rule and the *trapos*' instruments of patronage (including traditional patron-client ties) well

into the ideological and cultural spheres too. The emergent radical democratic framework in government/governance itself would have to be more fully developed and sharpened, and posited within Akbayan's counter-hegemonic strategy.

Those of the radical democratic perspective are up against not only the *trapos*, but also revisionist neoliberals, who present themselves as state reformists but who work in unholy cohabitation with the *trapos*. For some time now, revisionist neoliberals have been spreading ideas of good governance and people's participation in governance that give the illusion that empowerment of the powerless can be achieved without touching the power of the powerful. It is surprising that Philippine left groups of the radical democratic perspective, which have been very active in the movement against neoliberal globalization, have failed to recognize this crucial fight against neoliberalism in the home front, and have even, to some extent, unwittingly helped propagate the revised neoliberal concepts. The danger of erosion and cooptation cannot be underestimated. In the assessment of James Petras, almost all left groups, including former revolutionary groups, that have joined electoral politics and entered political office, have succumbed to globalist ideology.<sup>106</sup> His assessment may be too sweeping, but he probably is not entirely wrong.

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<sup>105</sup> Schönwälder 1998, p 97.

<sup>106</sup> Petras 1999, p. 34.

## *Chapter VI*

# **Special Areas of Concern: Popular Political Education and Working for Political Reform**

In previous chapters, I discussed the engagement of the emergent left parties and groups in the mass movement and development work, in elections, and in government work and governance – all in relation to their fight to end elite rule in the Philippines. In this chapter, I deal with two special areas of concern. The first, popular political education, does not really fall under any of the areas of engagement earlier mentioned, but has a great bearing on all of them. It has much to do with whittling the ideological and cultural domination of the elite over the masses in the Philippines' contested democracy. The second concern, working for political reform, has moved from being an advocacy of "the parliament of the streets" to being an endeavor conducted both outside *and inside* the legislature since the entry into Congress of some representatives of new left groups through the first party-list vote in 1998. This shift indicates the intensification of the efforts of the emergent left at building counter-hegemony.

Left parties and groups in the Philippines regard "raising the masses' political consciousness" as one of their fundamental tasks. In fact, they consider popular political education as absolutely essential for the success of their political endeavors – mass mobilizations, development projects, electoral campaigns and participatory governance. In conducting popular political education, some new left groups and allied POs/NGOs discarded the traditional teacher-student approach and moved to a dialogical form of pedagogy, which they believed to be more participatory and liberating. Dialogical "pop-ed" has made some contributions in such areas as development work, participatory governance and gender education. Neither the old nor the new approach in popular political pedagogy, however, has thus far proven to be effective in raising the masses' consciousness on, and combating, clientelist and patronage politics. The new

left's popular political education has also suffered from a lack of "pop-ed" materials in the vernacular and from a superficial discussion of Philippine political culture.

In trying to break elite hegemony, some of the emergent left parties and groups have paid special attention to working for major political reforms. Given the highly skewed distribution of the country's wealth and power, the new left groups and allied POs/NGOs have pushed for reform measures fostering the fuller participation and representation of marginalized or unrepresented sectors of the population (e.g., the party-list system and "absentee voting" for overseas Filipinos), as well as those curbing elite domination and manipulation of political processes and institutions (e.g., election modernization<sup>1</sup> and a ban on political dynasties.<sup>2</sup>) The new left groups joined broad movements that opposed the attempts of Presidents Ramos and Estrada and Speaker De Venecia to have the constitution amended, seeing these moves as being self-serving or for vested interests. Since 2002, however, some left groups have declared that they are for constitutional reform – but through an elected constitutional convention, not a constituent assembly.<sup>3</sup> For its part, Akbayan, favors a shift to a parliamentary form of government with a system of proportional representation to significantly lessen the use of patronage and "guns, goons and gold" in elections. In the course of pushing for political reforms, some of the new left groups appear to have become more skilled and sophisticated in combining legislative work with mass actions and campaigns and with lobby work.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Philippines, "election modernization" simply means the shift to automation – or the use of automated counting machines, computer equipment and other appropriate devices – in the process of voting, counting of votes and canvassing and consolidation of election results.

<sup>2</sup> The ban on political dynasties is actually constitutionally-mandated, but it needs enabling legislation as the Philippine constitution provides that the state shall "prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law." In various congresses, bills have been filed providing that a person up to a certain degree of consanguinity (second, third or fourth) to an incumbent elected official be barred from running for public office, or from succeeding the incumbent.

<sup>3</sup> Amendments to the Philippine constitution (ratified in 1987) may be proposed by Congress gathered as a constituent assembly, upon a vote of three-fourths of all its members, or by a constitutional convention, whose members are elected by Filipino voters according to district. Proposed amendments become valid when ratified by a majority of the votes cast in a plebiscite.



## I. Popular Political Education

### *From 'Basa-Talakay' to 'Dialogical Encounter'*

Philippine leftists have long recognized the importance of mass or popular education – i.e., political education – as a tool in “arousing, organizing and mobilizing” the masses in the struggle for fundamental political and social change. During the pre-martial law period, ND and SD activists conducted teach-ins and DGs (discussion groups) in schools, communities and public places, discussing Philippine history, the major ills plaguing the country and their ideas on an alternative society. In their efforts to “politicize” the masses, the NDs claimed to follow the Maoist tenet of the “mass line.” In practice, however, the pedagogy was far from being “from the masses, to the masses.”

Tracing the development of mass or popular political education in the Philippines, Roy Loredó observed that left activists (primarily the NDs) in the late 1960s and early 70s used the *basa-talakay* (read-then-discuss) method and mixed up education with propaganda. They did learn to talk in the masses’ language, and became good propagandists and organizers. What the activists imparted, however, was *their* own message or analysis, without them really learning from the masses. They had turned into “efficient transmission belts from the revolutionary centers of power to the periphery, the revolution’s cogs and wheels.” Under martial law, left activists shifted to an evocative approach of popular political education – they strove to draw out and structure the masses’ views and insights. In the last few years of Marcos’ rule, amid political crisis, mass education sessions turned very lively. All through this time, however, the NDs’ revolutionary line and its propaganda-education framework remained basically unchanged. After the 1986 “people power” uprising, a section of the ND movement, the popdems, began to see popular education in a different light. They regarded it as a tool for the masses’ liberation and empowerment. Strongly influenced by Paulo Freire’s ideas on the “pedagogy of the oppressed,”<sup>4</sup> the

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<sup>4</sup> “[E]very human being,” writes Freire, “no matter how ‘ignorant’ or submerged in the ‘culture of silence’ he may be, is capable of looking critically at his world in a *dialogical encounter* with others. Provided with the proper tools for such encounter, he can gradually perceive his personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it. In this process, the old, paternalistic teacher-student relationship is overcome.” And further: “Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated.” (Freire 1975, pp. 13, 52.)

popdems viewed popular education no longer as a process in which a teacher imparts knowledge to a student but more as a dialogical encounter between the two, with each learning something from the other. Furthermore, they saw popular education no longer as a mere echoing of a political program, but as the creation of new knowledge, including a re-thinking of the political line. And instead of looking only at the content and method of popular education as NDs had tended to in the past, the popdems took cognizance of the importance of the learning context. They thus adopted a “context-content-method framework.”<sup>5</sup>

The new<sup>6</sup> orientation on popular education actually took form in the course of two consultations organized by the popdems in August 1986 and April 1987 that were billed as Popular Education for Popular Empowerment (PEPE) I and II, respectively. Popular educators from various POs/NGOs participated in the two consultations. Afterwards, IPD constituted a team to take care of PEPE’s secretariat functions. IPD’s PEPE program evolved into a separate NGO. Today, PEPE continues to provide “pop-ed” services to POs/NGOs, primarily by developing the capacity of grassroots educators to respond to their constituencies’ needs.<sup>7</sup> In 1992, the popdems established the Education for Life Foundation (ELF), an NGO that engaged in grassroots leadership formation mainly through *paaralang bayan* (folk schools) and that was guided, like PEPE, by the new “pop-ed” orientation.<sup>8</sup> Since 1993, popular educators coming from various POs/NGOs from all over the country have gathered thrice (1993, 1996 and 1999) for the “Daupan Popular Educators’ Festival” to exchange experiences and insights in popular education, assess their work and set directions for the future.<sup>9</sup>

The mainstream NDs and the other left groups did not adopt the popdems’ “pop-ed” framework. They continued with their usual propaganda-education sessions, albeit sometimes conducted in an evocative style. Participation in elections starting in 1987 did not bring about any change in the mainstream NDs’ mass education orientation.

In 1991-2, left groups and left-aligned POs/NGOs involved in Project 2001 (including the popdems) engaged in “voters’ education” – “raising political consciousness among the voter population.” This meant “educating (and at times, re-educating) voters to adopt a more issue-oriented rather than a

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<sup>5</sup> Loreda 1999, pp. 77-94.

<sup>6</sup> In the Philippine context, at least.

<sup>7</sup> Garcia 1999b, pp. 115-9.

<sup>8</sup> Abes 1998, p. 62.

<sup>9</sup> Garcia, pp. 117-8; Fajardo 2000.

personality-centered attitude towards elections.”<sup>10</sup> Apart from participating in Project 2001, Pandayan initiated the formation of a coalition called Citizens for a Meaningful and Peaceful Elections (Compel), which encouraged many organizations, mostly church-based, to conduct “voters’ education” in their parishes and constituencies.<sup>11</sup> On the basis of the 1995 psychographic study on voter behavior of IPER, which showed that fraud, especially vote-buying, was a common occurrence in Philippine electoral politics, the Consortium on Electoral Reforms (CER) likewise launched a campaign for voter’s education in 1997-98.<sup>12</sup>

With the continuing virulence of vote-buying and other fraudulent acts in Philippine elections, the “voters’ education” efforts of various civic and religious groups as well as of the new left groups and allied POs/NGOs can be said to have been largely ineffective in addressing the problems of patronage and clientelism. “Political education seminars, voters’ education – we in the diocese conducted a lot of them, but they were all for nothing,” bewails a priest in Davao Oriental. “Afterwards, those who attended, even the lay leaders, accepted the money offered them.”<sup>13</sup> Tailored for the pre-election period, “voters’ education” tended to treat these problems merely as election-time occurrences, and not as part and parcel of everyday politics. Furthermore, it tended to revert to the traditional “banking” method of pedagogy; worse, it adopted a moralistic tone. Well-meaning advocates of clean and peaceful elections, often of middle-class background, lectured the masses on what the latter should do without much regard for social and historical context. With “voters’ education,” even the popdems, the initiators of dialogical “pop-ed,” fell back, at least to some extent, to the old ways.

“Voters’ education” appears to be strongly influenced by the notion of “civic education,” which, according to Carothers, has been a common feature of U.S. democracy assistance portfolios to the developing world, and has largely tended to focus on elections in recipient countries. Carothers assesses the results of “civic education” efforts as disappointing. He writes:

The experience of many civic education efforts points to one clear lesson: short-term formal instruction on democracy that presents the subject as a set of general principles and processes generally has little

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<sup>10</sup> Abad 1992.

<sup>11</sup> Gutierrez 1994b, p. 112.

<sup>12</sup> Consortium on Electoral Reforms, and Institute for Political and Electoral Reform 1997, pp. 14-15.

effect on participants. Such information is too abstract and usually too removed from the daily lives of most people ... Moreover, civic education in many transitional countries is negated by the actual practice of politics. It is hard for people to accept that a national legislature is a valuable body with important charge of representing their interests when they see every night on their televisions endless squabbling sessions of a corrupt, feckless parliament. Teaching them that elections are essential to democracy has little effect if the only elections they know are manipulated by a dominant party to entrench its power still further.<sup>14</sup>

In a study on class divide and electoral reform in the Philippines, Schaffer has this critique of “voters’ education” programs:

Clean election reform in the Philippines ... has a class dimension. Reformers are drawn disproportionately from the middle and upper classes, while those targeted for reform – ‘education’ in the language of the reformers – are the poor. The project of reform, looked at in this way, is an effort to discipline the poor, to inculcate them with the values of the better-off. There are at least two ways in which this class character of reform frustrates the larger project of deepening Philippine democracy. First, some among the Catholic poor (who make up the bulk of the voting population) find the political education they receive from the Church to be alienating, the result of which is to discredit its attempts to clean up the electoral process. Second, voter education campaigns crafted by those in the middle and upper classes misunderstand the nature of practices among the poor they wish to reform. These campaigns, at least with regards to vote buying, are ineffective and offensive, one consequence of which may be to further estrange the poor not only from the rich, but from democracy itself.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Fr. Ben Verzosa, assistant parish priest, Banaybanay, Davao Oriental, 10 July 2002, in Banaybanay.

<sup>14</sup> Carothers 1999a, pp. 231-3.

<sup>15</sup> Schaffer 2001, p. 19.

## ***Problems in “Pop-Ed”***

During my fieldwork in 2002, I noted some problems in the popular political education work of the emergent left parties and groups. In Akbayan areas, I immediately perceived a language problem. In all of the Akbayan areas I visited, there was a dearth of popular education materials in Filipino or other local languages. This simply meant that Akbayan’s grassroots educators had to translate verbally to the masses whatever printed material (in English) they were using. Explaining concepts was hard enough; the absence of popular education materials in the vernacular made it even more so. From her own personal experience, an Akbayan member working with PEPE illustrated how concepts could get garbled in translation:

Translation is a challenge because Akbayan is offering alternatives that people are not very familiar with yet. I remember in Bataan, when we interviewed people about their ideas on *kapangyarihan* [power], they referred to it as “dirty,” “controlled by the big people in politics,” and “used by the rich.” When asked what for them is *pagsasakapangyarihan*, the Tagalog equivalent that we in the NGOs use for “empowerment,” most of the respondents had difficulty in describing it. They did not equate this with their efforts for change. One respondent even said, “This is a trespassing on my very person.” Another said it was “constriction and control of what I want.”<sup>16</sup>

Another problem was that the emergent left parties and groups afforded only superficial treatment of Philippine political culture. Particularly weak was the discussion on the ideological and cultural weapons wielded by the oligarchic elite to maintain its hold on economic resources and political power. The 1990s saw the publication of many excellent studies on Philippine political culture and particular aspects of it – clan politics, voter behavior, pork barrel, everyday politics, corruption, bossism, etc.<sup>17</sup> Some of these emanated from the academe or the media, but others were produced by left-aligned NGOs like IPD, IPG and IPER. I noted, however, that the findings of these studies were not well

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<sup>16</sup> Electronic communication with Cecilia Soriano, 12 June 2003. (*Some parts translated from Filipino.*)

<sup>17</sup> Some noteworthy studies dealing mainly or in part with Philippine political culture are: Kerkvliet 1990; Kerkvliet and Mojares 1991; Gutierrez, Torrente and Narca 1992; McCoy 1993; Lacaba 1995; Pertierra 1995; Institute for Political and Electoral Reform 1995a; Alejo, Rivera and Valencia 1996; Diokno 1997 (three-volume series); Sidel 1999.

incorporated in the popular education materials of the new left parties and groups. In Akbayan's case, there had been a fair amount of interest in, and discussion on, political culture during the party's formative stage.<sup>18</sup> At its founding congress, Akbayan adopted a cultural platform in which it recognized corruption, nepotism, political violence and money politics as elements of Philippine political culture that had specific historical and institutional sources, and it expressed confidence in the Filipinos' capacity to reshape the political culture and to move away from patronage politics.<sup>19</sup> Some leading Akbayan figures attempted to build an Active Citizenship Foundation (ACF) as an NGO that would conduct orientation and political education seminars. They believed that "a change in political culture ... essentially involves reorientation in consciousness, value systems and behavioral patterns." The ACF project, however, fell through, as Akbayan got caught up in various mass campaigns and other immediate concerns. Akbayan's education committee tried to fill the gap, but it became too busy attending to the political education needs of Akbayan members themselves.

What particularly struck me about the conduct of popular political education during my fieldwork, however, was the decline of the dialogical "pop-ed" approach. I had thought that in terms of popular empowerment as well as effectiveness in combating patronage politics, the dialogical approach would clearly be superior to the traditional lecture or "banking" style of pedagogy. Did not dialogical "pop-ed" mean that the masses would discuss themes and analyze events on the basis of their own experiences and in their own language, that they would thus understand and internalize concepts better, and that they themselves would decide on their course of action? The dialogical method did show up in some Batman endeavors, particularly BDP-PRA, but only to some extent. On the whole, the emergent left parties and groups did not make much use of it and they often resorted to the usual lecture style of instruction. "In Akbayan," writes Soriano, "there is indeed an intent for dialogue. But activists in many NGOs and political groups (and not only in Akbayan), feeling comfortably assured that they work on behalf of the people, have been complacent in their political education work. The needed rigor and patience for dialogue are sometimes forgotten. Educators have also been lax in questioning their own assumptions

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<sup>18</sup> See Montiel 1997, pp. 111-123.

<sup>19</sup> Akbayan National Congress 1998c, pp. 2-3.

about democracy, development and local governance. There is a need for self-reflexivity among educators.”<sup>20</sup>

“Pop-ed,” I found out, had undergone a crisis of sorts. After Daupan III (1999), those engaging in dialogical “pop-ed” raised doubts about the efficacy of their approach. Popular educators affiliated with Daupan, declares Loreda, were no longer sure that “pop-ed” was what the people really needed. According to him, “pop-ed” in the Philippines tended to be defined by international and local donor agencies, not by the people themselves. Oriented towards a “globalized” context, popular educators no longer responded to the actual needs of small communities. “Pop-ed” followed a “flavor of the month” pattern – the emphasis or theme of education work depended on what programs donor agencies were inclined to fund.<sup>21</sup>

In my fieldwork, I discerned that the problem with “pop-ed” was not with the dialogical approach itself but with the way it was being applied. Dialogical education involves, as Freire puts it, “the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world” and “the investigation of generative themes.”<sup>22</sup> Instead of helping the people discover generative themes, popular educators often came with their own themes – or rather, the “flavor of the month” themes espoused by donor agencies such as sustainable development, good governance, people’s participation and gender education. The situation could have been remedied if popular educators had moved on through a dialogical process to the masses’ “generative themes.” However, popular educators often stuck to the familiar themes. Moreover, they tended to remain within the “positive” “harmony” framework of most donor agencies on these themes, and to avoid dealing squarely with “negative,” “conflictual” concerns such as domination, clientelism and patrimonialism. Popular educators missed countless opportunities to conduct “problem-posing education” on patronage politics. By “problems,” I refer not just to cases of big-time corruption, fraud and political violence, but also to the many instances when patronage politics reared its ugly head in local everyday life – at baptisms, weddings and funerals; on billboards of newly-built roads, bridges and public school buildings; at the long lines of job- and emergency help-seekers at the municipal hall (or at a

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<sup>20</sup> Email communication with Cecilia Soriano, 1 June 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Fajardo 2000.

<sup>22</sup> Freire 1996, pp. 60, 85. According to Freire (p. 83), generative themes “contain the possibility of unfolding into again as many themes, which in turn call for new tasks to be fulfilled.”

government official's house); etc. Posing these problems could very well have stimulated reflection-action on patronage and clientelism.

Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs have made some achievements and gains in dialogical "pop-ed," especially in relation to issues of development, participatory and gender. It would seem, however, that for a deeper and more empowering "pop-ed," they would have to address patronage and clientelism in a more head-on and sharper way, bearing fully in mind that the *trapo* frame has succeeded in intermeshing with popular culture in many ways. Organizers and activists would have to develop their skills in problem-posing and in evoking generative themes. Moreover, the new left would have to produce a lot more "pop-ed" materials that are in the language of the masses and that, among other things, promote a deeper understanding of political culture.

## **II. Working for Political Reform**

### ***Party-List Law: Breakthrough for the Emergent Left in Political Reform***

After the fall of Marcos in 1986, the left was slow and hesitant in moving into the realm of working for political reform. During the sessions of the Constitutional Commission (ConCom) in 1986, some left groups supported proposals put forward by leftist and progressive commissioners, but the NDs, in general, were lukewarm towards the process of the making of a new constitution. After all, the NDs espoused revolution, not reform. In the February 1987 constitutional plebiscite, the NDs campaigned for a rejection of the new charter, while the emergent left groups like the popdems and Bisig pushed for a "critical yes." When the bill for the Local Government Code was introduced in Congress shortly after the ratification of the new constitution, left groups did not pay much attention to it. Even for left groups that were open to working for reform, the passage of the Code seemed much too tall an order. The 1987 Constitution contained many provisions on decentralization and local autonomy – 21 provisions in all<sup>23</sup> – but these needed enabling legislation. Since the granting of Philippine independence in 1946, national politicians had always managed to block or significantly water down measures providing for devolution of powers to local governments. By what some viewed as a historical accident, Congress passed the Code in October 1991. According to Kent Eaton, members of the lower



house, after doing nothing about the Code for more than four years, rushed to see it through in 1991 in the hope of getting the electoral support of President Aquino, who regarded decentralization as “the linchpin of her administration,” and of House Speaker Ramon Mitra, a presidential aspirant who himself was seeking Aquino’s “anointment.”<sup>24</sup> Left groups played no significant role in the approval of the Code.

The first stirrings in political reform advocacy among the emergent left groups occurred at about the same time that the Local Government Code was being rushed for approval. The left groups and POs/NGOs involved in Project 2001 included “lobbying for electoral reforms” as one of their tasks.<sup>25</sup> Mainly upon Pandayan’s initiative, Project 2001 and supportive NGOs held a conference on electoral reforms and participation to try to build consensus on amendments in the election code, among other objectives.<sup>26</sup> Pandayan also became actively involved in helping organize forums on major political reform issues such as the Local Government Code, the party-list system and the shift to a parliamentary form of government.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, the NDs established an NGO to work for political and electoral reform, IPER. At this time, the NDs were still locked in an intense debate on strategy, including the role of electoral struggle and parliamentary work in the overall strategy. When the ND movement split in 1992-3, the members of IPER aligned themselves with the “rejectionists,” and later joined Siglaya.<sup>28</sup> The left groups involved in Project 2001 and the first Akbayan (then a non-party formation) came together immediately after the 1992 elections and conceived of IPG as a political institute that, apart from serving as a think tank, would coordinate electoral and local governance programs.<sup>29</sup> When IPG was being formally established in 1994, Prof. Francisco Nemenzo, Jr., a Bisig political council member, urged the new left forces to take up the struggle for electoral reform as a strategic concern and change the balance of forces in the electoral landscape. Following his advice, the IPG resolved to “push for electoral reforms as a strategic agenda, both as a movement-level agenda and as a political advocacy agenda.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Villarin 1996, p. 61.

<sup>24</sup> Eaton 2001, pp. 114-8.

<sup>25</sup> Abad 1991, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Gutierrez 1994b, pp. 111-2.

<sup>27</sup> See Macuja 1992.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Ramon Casiple, executive director, IPER, 26 March 2002, Quezon City.

<sup>29</sup> Santos 1997b, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Institute of Politics and Governance 1994, pp. 9-11.

As discussed in Chapter V, the emergent left groups seized upon the openings provided by the Local Government Code to promote participation in governance and to deepen democratization. The Code had another effect on the new left groups: its passage helped inspire and embolden them to push for other political reforms. If a progressive bill of major significance like the Code could make it through a den of *trapos*, then perhaps some others could make it through too.

The emergent left groups turned their attention to a new election code proposed by the Comelec (then still headed by a very much reform-oriented chairman, Christian Monsod), and certified as an urgent bill by President Ramos himself. The proposed code was intended to replace the Omnibus Election Code of 1985, passed when the dictator Marcos was still in power. A product of extensive consultations with various political parties, legal practitioners, NGOs and local Comelec workers, the proposed code sought to modernize the electoral process and to institute sweeping electoral reforms. Of particular concern to the new left groups were provisions designed to curb elite domination and dirty *trapo* tricks in the electoral process (e.g., election modernization, a ban on turncoatism and a ban on political dynasties) and provisions designed to ensure greater participation and representation of marginalized or unrepresented sectors of the population (e.g., the party-list system of representation, the election of sectoral representatives in local councils, and “absentee voting” for overseas Filipinos). Some NGOs aligned with the new left groups joined the *Kilusang Mamamayan para sa Repormang Elektoral* (Kumare-Kumpare or People’s Movement for Electoral Reform), a coalition of 13 networks coming from various sectors that campaigned for the passage of the new election code.<sup>31</sup> The left groups themselves, however, did not go all out for the proposed code. Although they regarded it, on the whole, as progressive, they were not fully convinced about the importance or even merit of all the reform measures contained in it. They decided to campaign only for a number of particular reforms in the proposed code like election modernization, the party-list system, local sectoral representation and the ban on dynasties. Top priority went to advocacy for the party-list system. Like decentralization, the party-list system (i.e., for choosing 20 percent of the members of the House of Representatives) was already mandated by the 1987 constitution but needed enabling legislation. A bill for this purpose had been filed in the House of Representatives as early as 1991 (8<sup>th</sup> Congress) and re-filed the next year (9<sup>th</sup> Congress). The emergent left

groups and allied POs/NGOs saw the party-list system as affording grassroots organizations and alternative parties the opportunity to gain seats in a legislature dominated by the traditional political parties.<sup>32</sup>

The proposed election code encountered great resistance in Congress. Many legislators apparently found some of its provisions like the ban on dynasties detrimental to their own interests.<sup>33</sup> Ostensibly to facilitate the code's discussion and approval, legislators filed separate bills for certain provisions.<sup>34</sup> Ramos and the Comelec, some of whose members were due to retire in early 1995, had hoped to see the proposed election code enacted before the May 1995 elections. As 1995 approached, however, hopes of the code being approved in time for the polls dimmed. The PO/NGO networks pushing for electoral reform and the new left groups persisted in lobbying for some of the bills for specific electoral reforms.

For the party-list bill, the lobbyists expected rough sailing in Congress, especially in the lower house, which was going to be directly affected by the reform measure. No major resistance within the two chambers materialized; legislators debated more on specific provisions of the bill. The intense lobbying by party-list advocates, including such new left groups as Bisig, Pandayan, the popdems, Sanlakas and Siglaya, bore fruit. Towards the end of 1994, both houses of Congress approved their respective versions of the bill. As the two houses discussed how to reconcile the two versions, the party-list lobbyists pushed for the banning of the five biggest parties in the first three party-list elections, a provision contained in the House version but not in the Senate version. In the end, the bicameral conference committee agreed to a compromise: a ban on the five only in the first party-list vote.<sup>35</sup>

The proposed election code never made it. Among the bills for specific electoral reforms, only one – the party-list bill – was enacted into law before the 1995 elections, but it could only be implemented starting in the 1998 polls. The Party-List System Act was quite a climb-down from all the sweeping reforms that the proposed election code, if approved, would have brought. For the new left groups and allied POs/NGOs, however, the enactment of the party-list law

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<sup>31</sup> See Formilleza 1994; Yorac and Agra 1994, pp. 69-74.

<sup>32</sup> Bukluran sa Ikauunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa (Bisig) 1996b, p. 86; Institute for Political and Electoral Reform 1995b, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> Carlos 1998, p. 82.

<sup>34</sup> Formilleza 1994, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Abelardo 1998, pp. 8-10. In June 2001, the Supreme Court ruled that a party-list organization must represent "marginalized and underrepresented sectors," thereby disqualifying the top five political parties from the party-list elections altogether.

constituted their first major victory in the struggle for political and electoral reform.

### ***Campaigning for Automated Elections, the Empowerment Bill and Local Sectoral Representation***

After the May 1995 elections, the new left groups and allied POs/NGOs continued working with coalitions and groups like Kumare-Kumpare and the National Citizens Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel) for the passage of other electoral reform bills, especially those on election modernization, absentee voting and local sectoral representation. The electoral reform advocates put election modernization – i.e., the automation or computerization of vote counting and canvassing – at the top of their list. In past elections, counting and canvassing had been a long, tedious process – lasting several weeks for elections at the national level – and they were very much vulnerable to fraud, especially the practice of *dagdag-bawas* (addition-subtraction). Cheating during counting and canvassing was a common occurrence and seemed to be getting even worse. Former Comelec chairman Monsod himself noted that *dagdag-bawas* “occurred in 1995 on an unprecedented scale heavily in favor of one side.”<sup>36</sup> The electoral reform advocates believed that computerization would bring about a vote counting process that would be much faster and less prone to error or fraud.<sup>37</sup> After failing to have election computerization approved in time for the 1995 elections, they now sought to have the first computerized national elections in 1998.

Immediately after the May 1995 elections, Congress approved an act authorizing the Comelec to pilot-test computerized vote counting and canvassing in the 1996 elections of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and to conduct public demonstrations of this computerized election system. The pilot test was a success, as attested to by the House Committee on Suffrage and Electoral Reforms and groups like Namfrel. After this, however, Congress moved too slowly. By the time the legislature passed the Election Modernization Act in December 1997, it was too late to put the automated system fully in place for the May 1998 national and local elections. Only the ARMM areas availed of computerized counting and canvassing in these elections. Due to the rushed

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<sup>36</sup> Monsod 1997, p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> Kilusang Mamamayan Para Sa Repormang Elektoral 1997.

setting-up of the system, however, the Comelec made printing and procedural errors and had to do manual recounts in some of the areas covered.

The fight for electoral automation did not end with the approval of the Election Modernization Act. In the 2001 elections, vote counting and canvassing were again done manually. The Comelec, bogged down by infighting, had failed to put up a computerized system although it had had three years to do it. Electoral reform groups led by Namfrel called for the impeachment of Luzviminda Tancangco, the chairperson of the Comelec's modernization committee, for gross negligence and inefficiency and the betrayal of the public trust. Her most controversial move was the awarding of a contract for a voters' registration and identification system to a private firm at a cost that was way beyond the budget. The P6.5 billion contract, ruled the Supreme Court, was "illegal and against public policy."<sup>38</sup> Akbayan and AKO, whose leaders signed the formal complaint submitted to the House Representatives, participated actively in the impeachment campaign. Despite the hard lobbying by the electoral reform groups, however, the House threw out the motion for Tancangco's impeachment.

Vote counting and canvassing in the 2004 elections again were manual. This time, the entire Comelec was to blame. In January 2004, a month before the start of the election campaign, the Supreme Court ruled that the Comelec's awarding of a P1.3 billion contract for vote counting machines to another private firm violated the law and the Comelec's own bidding rules. In addition, the court found the machines vulnerable "to election fraud on a massive scale by means of just a few key strokes." It was the second time in less than two years that the court voided an election modernization contract. "The illegal, imprudent and hasty actions of the commission have not only desecrated legal and jurisprudential norms, but have also cast serious doubts upon the poll body's ability and capacity to conduct automated elections," the Supreme Court declared.<sup>39</sup> A survey of the Social Weather Stations later indicated that 58 per cent of voters perceived corruption as having been involved in the awarding of the contract.<sup>40</sup>

Electoral reform groups had no choice but to set their sights on a new date for computerized elections: May 2007. This would be just months before the tenth anniversary of the Election Modernization Act.

In 1996-7, even as the emergent left groups and allied POs/NGOs were in the thick of the campaign for the approval of the Election Modernization Act,

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<sup>38</sup> Concepcion and 22 other complainants 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Tubeza 2004, p. 1.

they became involved in another campaign for political reform – the passage of the “Empowerment Bill.” A provision in the Local Government Code stipulated that Congress should undertake a mandatory review of the Code at least once in five years. Taking cognizance of this provision, POs/NGOs aligned with Bisig, Pandayan, the popdems and Siglaya took the lead in forming the NGO-PO Working Group on the Local Government Code Review, anchored by IPG. The Working Group decided to engage the official review process as well as to conduct a parallel PO/NGO process.<sup>41</sup> It followed a course of programmatic demand making. After over a year of conducting studies and consultations, the IPG drafted the Empowerment Bill, which Senator Juan Flavio and Representative Florencio Abad filed in the Senate and House of Representatives respectively. According to Kaisahan executive director Villarin, the bill sought “to broaden, enhance and institutionalize NGO-PO participation in local governance by way of amending the 1991 LGC in the following selected areas: declaration of policy, rules of interpretation, mandatory consultations, role of NGOs-POs, sectoral representation, recall and disciplinary action, local special bodies, and initiative and referendum.”<sup>42</sup>

The Working Group did not restrict its work to just Congress and the PO/NGO community. In preparation for the congressional review, the Working Group held a series of consultations with the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) and with the Leagues of Provinces, Cities and Municipalities in the Philippines. The Working Group managed to convince DILG to pick the “Empowerment Bill” as the main source on issues related to people’s participation in drafting the executive branch’s proposed amendments to the Code.<sup>43</sup> The group failed to get the endorsement of the Leagues for the bill as, in IPD executive director Soliman Santos’ assessment, this would have meant sharing local power with local communities. On the important question of local sectoral representation, the group managed to get the support of the League of Provinces and the League of Cities but not the League of Municipalities.<sup>44</sup> Significantly, however, the Working Group succeeded in forging “a strategic alliance for local autonomy and people’s empowerment” with the Leagues in April 1997. The two sides agreed to support “the decentralization thrust in resource mobilization, basic services and regulatory functions, and control

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<sup>40</sup> Marfil 2004, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Institute of Politics and Governance 1997, p. 16.

<sup>42</sup> Villarin 1997, p. 123.

<sup>43</sup> Institute of Politics and Governance 1997, p. 18.

<sup>44</sup> Santos 1997b, pp. 11-12.

supervision over local offices/officers” as well as “the democratization thrust of people’s participation in local governance.” They achieved consensus on many points in the following areas: national-local government and inter-local government relations; devolution; regulatory powers and franchising authority; local resources and funds and local taxation; local development corporations and enterprises; human resources development and public accountability; and local boards and special bodies. And they called on Congress to give the review due attention and to give priority to amendments enhancing decentralization and democratization.<sup>45</sup>

The official Code review process proved most frustrating. Congress did not actually conduct the review even though it was supposed to be mandatory. The Empowerment Bill got only as far as the first reading. In preparing for the review, however, the POs/NGOs involved in the Working Group gained some valuable experiences, especially in the drafting of a legislative bill and in the link-up and dialogue with the Leagues. With the 1998 elections fast approaching, the Working Group decided to put off its campaigning for the Code review and for the Empowerment Bill and to concentrate on working for the approval of one of the main features of the Empowerment Bill, local sectoral representation – but as a separate bill.

The Local Government Code actually provides for the election of sectoral representatives – one from the women, one from the workers, farmers and fisherfolk, and one from another marginalized sector (e.g, the urban poor, indigenous cultural communities and disabled persons) – in all municipalities, cities and provinces. This provision, however, was never implemented as Republic Act 7887, passed in February 1995, stipulated enabling legislation for such election to be held. The new left groups and allied POs/NGOs viewed local sectoral representation as a local version of the party-list system, another instance of affirmative action, ensuring that marginalized sectors would be able to express their own concerns and needs and to participate in local development planning and law making. They also saw it as a means for breaking elite domination in local politics. IPG declared, “With a plurality of voices in a democracy, especially in democracies dominated by a ruling minority, we must ensure that the marginalized have a venue for participation in governance.”<sup>46</sup>

Saligan drafted a bill providing for the manner and date of election of local sectoral representatives and succeeded in getting several legislators from

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<sup>45</sup> Leagues of Provinces, Cities and Municipalities in the Philippines and the NGO-PO Working Group on the LGC Review 1997, pp. 151-3.

both houses of the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress to sponsor the bill. Electoral reform groups, including the new left groups and the PO-NGO Working Group (coordinated by the IPG), lobbied hard for the bill's passage, hoping to get it approved in time for such election to be made part of the 1998 national and local elections. The bill was scheduled for deliberation but got caught in the legislature's recess. In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Congresses, several legislators, among them Party-list Representatives Montemayor (ABA) and Rosales (Akbayan), filed a revised version drafted by Kaisahan and the Local Governance Policy Forum. The bill's lobbyists got wide support from the League of Municipalities of the Philippines and the NAPC Basic Sectors' Council. Despite this, Arroyo did not give the bill priority status. In June 2003, the House of Representatives of the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress finally passed House Bill 5781, a consolidated version of three bills including Rosales'. The Senate bill, however, languished as Senator Edgardo Angara, the chairperson of the committee on constitutional amendments, revision of codes and laws, refused to hold a committee hearing.<sup>47</sup> For the first election of local sectoral representatives, the electoral reform groups had no choice but to look towards May 2007, same as for the first computerized elections.

### ***Opposing Cha-cha but Opening to a Shift to a Parliamentary System***

The system of government, particularly the issue of presidential versus parliamentary system, has been a recurrent debate in the Philippines since the late 1800s, at the time of the first Philippine Republic. Presidentialism versus parliamentarism had featured prominently in the discussions and debates of the constitutional conventions of 1935 and 1971 and the constitutional commission of 1986. In 1993, just six years after the ratification of the new constitution, the issue came back to the fore. The House of Representatives, apparently with the backing of President Ramos, passed a resolution calling for the convening of Congress into a constituent assembly to amend the 1987 constitution, particularly to change the Philippine system of government from a presidential to a French-style parliamentary system.<sup>48</sup> Ramos, who had said he favored a parliamentary system during the 1992 election campaign, was constitutionally barred from running for reelection.

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<sup>46</sup> Santos 1997d; Institute of Politics and Governance 1999, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Email communication with Nina Iszatt, coordinator, policy advocacy and campaigns center, *Kaisahan tungo sa Kaunlaran ng Kanayunan at Repormang Pansakahan*, 7 July 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Abad 1997, p. 48.



New left groups wondered whether to support a parliamentary system. It was a much more complicated political reform measure to tackle and it was fraught with risks. Unlike the Local Government Code and the Party-List Act, which were laws for the implementation of certain provisions in the 1987 Constitution, a shift to a parliamentary form of government required constitutional amendment. Opening the door to a single amendment in the constitution meant opening the door too to other charter amendments or even to a revision of the entire charter – for better or for worse.

The initial reaction within the ranks of the emergent left groups was mixed. Some members urged that the left support the shift to a parliamentary system, on the grounds that this would promote greater engagement and intervention of “progressives” in electoral politics.<sup>49</sup> Others wanted the new left to participate in the presidential-parliamentary system debate but not to be too closely identified with a particular position.<sup>50</sup> Soon, the political blocs of the emergent left took different stands. Bisig and the popdems opted for the parliamentary system, believing that this would strengthen the political party system in the country. Pandayan and Siglaya adopted a more cautious non-committal stance, as they did not want themselves to be put in an awkward alliance with administration advocates nor to be used by officials wishing to extend their terms.<sup>51</sup>

Public discussion and debate on a shift to the parliamentary system and on charter change picked up tremendously and came to a head in the second half of Ramos’ term. Shortly after the 1995 elections, pro-Ramos forces, as well as many elected officials who could no longer run again due to term limits, intensified their moves for a constitutional change. The House committee on constitutional amendments started public hearings on the presidential-parliamentary system issue. The National Security Council (NSC) produced a draft constitution, which provided for a parliamentary system. Exposed by the media, the draft charter became controversial, as critics charged it of exhibiting “authoritarian tendencies.” In December 1996, pro-Ramos groups started gathering signatures for a “people’s initiative” to amend the constitution to remove the one-term limit on the presidency. They then formally organized themselves into the People’s Initiative for Reform, Modernization and Action (Pirma). Viewing the one-term limit as a safeguard against future dictators, prominent EDSA I figures like Corazon Aquino and Cardinal Sin led a broad

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<sup>49</sup> See Parreño 1993.

<sup>50</sup> Rocamora 1997b, p. 24.

movement to oppose “cha-cha” (charter change). The left – the NDs as well as the emergent left groups – sensed the danger of a return to authoritarian rule; thus, virtually the entire spectrum of the left went all out in campaigning against “cha-cha.” In March 1997, the Supreme Court threw out a petition of Pirma on the “people’s initiative,” on the grounds that there was yet no implementing law for this.<sup>52</sup> Even as Pirma appealed the decision, pro-Ramos forces tried another route for constitutional change: the convening of Congress as a constituent assembly. In September 1997, on the 25th anniversary of the imposition of martial law, 500,000 people packed into Luneta Park in Manila to oppose cha-cha. Two days later, the Supreme Court rejected Pirma’s appeal.<sup>53</sup> Due to strong public opposition, the House was forced to abandon its push for a constituent assembly. Ramos’ “cha-cha” ground to a halt.

Although the left opposed Ramos’ cha-cha, some of the emergent left groups did not rule out the possibility of working for charter change at a more propitious time in the future. Bisig, Pandayan, the popdems and Siglaya – all against Ramos’ cha-cha – took a strong pro-parliamentary system stance when they formally banded together to form Akbayan. During its founding congress in January 1998, Akbayan castigated the presidential system and argued for a switch to the parliamentary system:

The presidential system has generated a policy formulation process dominated by horse trading, by politician interference in policy implementation. It has also generated political parties that cannot play the role they should play in policy formulation. Without political parties with distinct programs and stable membership, policy formulation cannot be removed from the circuits of horse trading ... We believe that a parliamentary form of government and a party list electoral system will generate political parties better able to perform the function of identifying interests and opinions in society, shaping these opinions into a coherent program and facilitating policy formulation in government.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Hofileña 1997, p. 163.

<sup>52</sup> Rocamora 1997c, pp. 90-133; Hofileña 1997, pp. 134-69. *Pirma* is the Filipino word for “to sign.”

<sup>53</sup> Suh and Lopez 1997.

<sup>54</sup> Akbayan National Congress 1998a, pp. 3-4.

Akbayan also advocated the adoption of a system of proportional representation – in effect, a party-list system for electing the entire membership of the legislature, not just a small part of it – to remove the highly personalized character of Philippine elections, shift the focus to political parties, and gradually eliminate money politics and the use of violence. Going beyond the presidential-parliamentary system debate, Akbayan decided to promote discussions on the issue of changing from a unitary to a federal form of government, taking cognizance of the central government's neglect of the people of Mindanao.<sup>55</sup> A shift from unitary to federal, like that from presidential to parliamentary, required a constitutional amendment.

Constitutional change became a big issue once again barely two years after the defeat of Ramos' cha-cha. In his state of the nation address in August 1999, President Estrada proposed the convening of Congress as a constituent assembly to amend constitutional provisions purportedly restricting the flow of investments and technologies into the Philippines, particularly those prohibiting foreign ownership of land and limiting foreign equity in local businesses. The broad movement against Ramos' cha-cha revived. Many did not trust a *trapo*-dominated Congress, acting as a constituent assembly, to restrict itself to economic reforms and to leave term limits and anti-authoritarianism safeguards untouched. To allay such fears, Estrada came up with a two-part reform process, which he called the Constitutional Correction for Development (Concord). In the first part, Congress as a constituent assembly would take up economic reforms and eventually submit amendments for approval in a plebiscite coinciding with the 2001 elections. In the second part, a duly-elected constitutional convention would tackle political reforms. This would only be convened, however, after the end of his term in 2004. To justify his proposed economic reforms further, he stressed that Concord was pro-poor, that it would allow him to move his poverty-eradication program beyond rhetoric to action.<sup>56</sup> Critics of Estrada's charter change initiative remained unconvinced. Opposition to Cha-cha II did not abate. In January 2000, amid the discord, Estrada was forced to shelve Concord.<sup>57</sup> The "Oust-Erap" campaign that culminated in Estrada's fall in January 2001 spelled the end for Concord.

The left's opposition to Estrada's Concord had gone much deeper than just a distrust of a constituent assembly. "The national patrimony provisions of the constitution that President Estrada wants to remove," Akbayan stated, "are

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<sup>55</sup> Akbayan National Congress 1998a, pp. 9-12.

<sup>56</sup> Editorial Board, *Governance Brief* 1999, pp. 1-2; Office of the Press Secretary 1999.

among the few remaining defenses of our economy against unruly globalization.”<sup>58</sup> Padayon charged that Concord would “completely open the Philippine economy to global forces in one stroke.”<sup>59</sup> PMP chairman Filemon Lagman lumped Concord together with such other “anti-poor and anti-people policies” of Estrada as “the continuous privatization of state-owned corporations and the further liberalization of our economy in favor of imperialist globalization.”<sup>60</sup>

Notwithstanding its strong anti-Concord position, Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs again did not rule out constitutional change. In fact, Akbayan urged that the matter be immediately addressed: “[I]f constitutional reform can be re-framed within a participatory and democratic process, if cha cha is undertaken within an elected Constitutional Convention, the challenge of constitutional reform should be confronted now. We must prepare for the struggle on the substantive issues of constitutional reform as soon as possible.”<sup>61</sup>

### ***Campaigning for Suffrage for Overseas Filipinos***

Prior to 1998, the emergent left groups and allied POs/NGOs waged the fight for political reform from outside Congress, mainly through “the parliament of the steets.” In lobbying for reform bills, they even went to the extent of drafting bills for legislators. With the victory of some new left parties and groups in the first party-list elections in 1998, the terrain changed a bit. Now the left groups could fight for reforms from both outside and inside the legislature. As mentioned earlier, the groups’ representatives in the lower house endorsed or sponsored political reform bills such as the empowerment and local sectoral representation bills. They also spoke out on matters related to the implementation of reform laws already enacted such as the Election Modernization Act and the Party-List System Act. The first political reform bill passed by Congress in which a new left party’s representative played a major role in its enactment was the Overseas Absentee Voting Act, a law providing for a system of voting for overseas Filipinos.

In 2000, the government’s Commission on Filipinos Overseas estimated that there were 7.38 million Filipinos abroad, roughly ten per cent of the

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<sup>57</sup> Sprague and Lopez 2000.

<sup>58</sup> Akbayan 1999, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Padayon 1999, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino 2000, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Akbayan 1999, p. 1.

Philippine population. Spread out in over 180 countries, the overseas Filipinos (OFs) included 2.99 million migrant workers, 2.55 million immigrants, and 1.84 million with irregular status.<sup>62</sup> By sending money to their families in the Philippines (\$6-8 billion annually in bank remittances,<sup>63</sup> and billions of dollars more through other means), OFs contributed a great deal to the Philippine economy and helped keep it afloat in times of crisis. The government hailed them as modern-day heroes. Yet OFs did not enjoy suffrage. The 1987 constitution expressly stipulated that Congress should provide a system for absentee voting for Filipinos abroad, but even after more than a decade, the legislature still had not come up with an enabling law. The House of Representatives had approved the absentee voting bill during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Congresses, but the Senate had not.<sup>64</sup>

Soon after one of its members was elected to Congress, Akbayan decided to make absentee voting a priority. After examining the six House bills on overseas voting then pending, Akbayan concluded the bills put too many restrictions on the OFs' right to vote, e.g., exclusion of immigrants, exclusion from the party-list ballot, etc. Thus, in her first year in Congress, Akbayan Representative Rosales joined the committee on suffrage and electoral reforms and filed her own bill on absentee voting. "Apart from their significant contribution to the Philippine economy," stated Rosales in her bill, "[OFs] represent a political and social bloc, whose exposures to various cultures, to different concepts and practices of democracy, to new technology, make them a distinct sector that has yet to be tapped to work towards the overall development and transformation of our country."<sup>65</sup> Rosales took an active role in arranging a series of consultations by members of the committee on suffrage with OF organizations in Western Europe and Asia. She worked closely with organizations like the Manila-based *Kapisanan ng mga Kamag-anak ng Migranteng Manggagawang Pilipino, Inc.* (KAKAMMPI or Association of Families of Overseas Filipino Workers and Migrant Returnees) and the Netherlands-based Platform of Filipino Migrant Organizations in Europe, which campaigned hard for the passage of absentee voting and organized "advocacy visits" by delegations of OFs.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Syjuco 2002, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> Akbayan 2004, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Opiniano 2001.

<sup>65</sup> Rosales 1999, pp. 1-2.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Rosales, 12 January 2003, Quezon City.

Both houses of Congress produced their respective consolidated versions of the absentee voting bill in 2000, and both versions awaited floor deliberation. Rosales was all set to present the house bill for second reading in the House when the “*jueteng*-gate” scandal exploded. The impeachment proceedings against Estrada and the turbulent events leading to his ouster in January 2001 upset the Congress timetables completely and dashed all prospects of the absentee voting bill being approved by the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress.<sup>67</sup> After EDSA II, the absentee voting lobby, as Ellene Sana, KAKAMMPI advocacy officer and Akbayan member, glumly assessed, was “back to square one.”<sup>68</sup>

Not quite. The momentum of the absentee voting campaign had built up. As KAKAMMPI and Platform plugged on, the ranks of the campaigners swelled. Among those that signed up were large OF organizations and networks like the US-based National Federation of Filipino-American Associations (NaFFAA) and eLagda and the Saudi Arabia-based Overseas Filipino Workers’ Congress; dozens of country- or city-based OF organizations; and international solidarity formations like the Netherlands-based Philippine-European Solidarity Centre and the Solidarity Philippines-Australia Network). In March 2000, the overseas voting advocates put up the Global Coalition for the Political Empowerment of Overseas Filipinos (Empower). In a ringing manifesto published in various OF community newspapers, Empower, speaking in behalf of OFs, demanded “our inalienable right to vote” and called on President Arroyo, the political parties and all prospective legislators to prioritize and ensure the passage of an absentee voting law. The absentee voting advocates campaigned through emails, egroups and websites, posted letters and postcards, faxes and text messages, targeting Malacañang and Congress, as well as influential personages and groups in the media, church, academe, POs/NGOs, etc. Soon, many opinion articles, letters and editorials pushing for or endorsing absentee voting appeared in the major dailies. Appeals from OFs were aired in the broadcast media. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) issued statements urging the government to give priority to the enactment of an absentee voting law. In August 2000, the campaigners organized a much bigger “advocacy visit.” Through the coordination of Empower, KAKAMMPI, Platform and eLagda, more than 50 representatives of OF and local support organizations lobbied Malacañang and Congress, making sure of extensive media coverage. Some OF

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<sup>67</sup> Sison 2001.

<sup>68</sup> Electronic communication with Ellene Sana, 6 February 2001.

leaders threatened a “remittance boycott” in the event that the government did not act on their demand for suffrage.<sup>69</sup>

The truly global campaign of OFs had a tremendous impact. In her first state of the nation address, Arroyo asked Congress to enact an absentee voting law. Legislators fell all over themselves in joining the absentee voting bandwagon. Eleven senators and eighteen representatives filed their own bills on the issue. In August 2001, Arroyo, Congress leaders, Comelec and Foreign Affairs officials warmly received the representatives of organizations advocating absentee voting and publicly committed themselves to an OF suffrage law. Political catalysis was reaching a climax.

The two houses of Congress passed their respective versions of the absentee voting bill in August 2002. The campaigners were greatly dissatisfied with the House version, which was essentially a pilot testing bill. It excluded immigrants, allowed OFs to vote only in the presidential and vice-presidential contests, disallowed personal campaigning and limited the effectivity of the law only to the 2004 elections.<sup>70</sup> Representative Rosales herself was not too happy with the limitations inserted in the House version, but she felt confident that something could still be done in the bicameral conference committee.<sup>71</sup> In the endgame, the campaigners trained their barrage on the bicameral committee. House members who had pushed for the limitations relented. The bicameral committee approved a version without the restrictive provisions and Arroyo signed it into law in February 2003.<sup>72</sup>

Akbayan had been actively involved in the campaign for the absentee voting bill. In both the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Congresses, Representative Rosales was in the thick of the debates on the bill. At the time of the campaign, Akbayan did not yet have chapters abroad (except in Greece), but this did not deter the party. Akbayan members and supporters in Manila-based OF support organizations reached out to allies and contacts in Filipino communities abroad.<sup>73</sup> OFs themselves and their support organizations in the Philippines were mainly responsible for the enactment of the absentee voting law. Akbayan’s main contribution had been to help in the OFs’ realization and unleashing of their power.

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<sup>69</sup> Voting Rights for Filipino Migrants Campaign Central, <http://www.philippineupdate.com/vote.htm>; Opiniano 2001.

<sup>70</sup> Jimenez 2003, p. 33.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Rosales.

<sup>72</sup> Voting Rights for Filipino Migrants Campaign Central.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Erwin Lara, secretary, House Committee on Suffrage and Electoral Reforms (1994-2001), 3 November 2003; Akbayan 2004, p. 7.

## ***Con-Ass versus Con-Con***

Despite the failed attempts of Ramos and Estrada at constitutional reform, the issue of charter change refused to go away. Groups in Mindanao like Kusog Mindanaw and Lihuk Pideral-Mindanaw, which, in 1999, had already started pushing for a shift to a federal system of government, intensified their campaign after the May 2001 elections. More organizations, as well as some respected scholars and personages, not limited to those from Mindanao, joined their ranks. Federalism's advocates, mostly coming from the provinces, believed that Manila-based bureaucrats were too biased in favor of "imperial Manila," and were hampering development efforts in areas outside of the national capital region. The federalists likewise believed that a federal system would be the best territorial method of addressing the Muslims' demand for self-governance and would thus help bring about a just and enduring peace in war-torn Mindanao.<sup>74</sup> The issue of charter change hit the front pages once again in April 2002 when Jose de Venecia, Jr., speaker of the House of Representatives, apparently with the support of most House members, espoused constitutional reform, particularly a shift to a parliamentary system, through a constituent assembly. He announced that he was calling a national summit of all political parties the next month to discuss charter change and other issues. Some critics of De Venecia charged that the move to amend the constitution was a ploy to eventually get himself installed as prime minister. Prominent opponents of previous charter change initiatives like Corazon Aquino and Cardinal Sin, however, kept silent this time.

Most left groups jettisoned De Venecia's cha-cha initiative, just as they had rejected Ramos' and Estrada's. The NDs adopted an outright anti-cha-cha stance. Some left groups, however, clarified that they did not oppose charter change *per se*. In a joint press statement, leaders of Sanlakas, PM and BMP declared, "There is no doubt that the Constitution should be changed for it is a reactionary charter that has served more the interests of the elite rather than [those of] the people. Yet while we believe that the Constitution must be changed, we oppose the proposed method for the Cha-Cha ... Instead of a constituent assembly, a non-partisan Constitutional Convention must be called and vested with the power to draft an entirely new charter."<sup>75</sup> Unlike most of the other left

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<sup>74</sup> Quimpo 2001a, p. 280.

<sup>75</sup> Fortaleza, Magtubo and Briz 2002, p. 1.



groups, Akbayan decided to “support cha-cha through the only possible democratic and participatory process, an elected constitutional convention.” It would work for “a shift to a parliamentary form of government, proportional representation elections and a federal system” even as it would “defend the 1987’s constitution’s progressive provisions.”<sup>76</sup> Akbayan further decided to engage De Venecia and his followers in discussion and debate and to try to convince those gravitating towards a constituent assembly to go for a constitutional convention instead. Thus, representatives of Akbayan, working closely with a group of NGOs called the Consortium on Constitutional Reform (CCR), participated actively in De Venecia’s “all-parties” summit project, both before and during the summit.

The “First Philippine Political Parties Conference” assembled heads and representatives of national and regional/local parties and party-list groups. However, some parties – both traditional, e.g., *Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino* (LDP or Struggle of Democratic Filipinos) and PDP, and left, e.g., Bayan Muna – did not attend. Akbayan representatives actively pushed for an agenda on political and electoral reforms that they had worked on with CCR. Surprisingly, they managed to get the conference participants, including the representatives of traditional parties, to agree to certain left positions. The participants, for instance, acknowledged the following in the summit declaration:

- “Rent seeking and crony capitalism diverted national resources from productive economic activities and discouraged the rise of an entrepreneurial class. Factionalism, patronage and bossism, along with the failure to adopt decisive policies to help the economy and the people to cope with the challenges and consequences of globalization, contributed to the crisis in our economy, with the result that social inequity and mass poverty incidence in our country are the highest in East Asia.”
- “A weak party system makes government vulnerable to the dictates of powerful interest groups in politics and the economy. Dealmaking and trading favors to build fragile coalitions behind candidates and programs elevate operators rather than statesmen to positions of power and authority in the state.”

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<sup>76</sup> Akbayan Executive Committee 2002, p. 3.

- “While we must adjust our nationalism to accommodate a progressively globalizing world economy and politics, we cannot entrust the protection of our country and the advancement of our economic interests to foreigners, foreign governments or multilateral institutions.”<sup>77</sup>

The representatives of pro-administration parties, however, managed to get the gathering’s support for President Arroyo’s Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan, which left groups had earlier criticized of being neoliberal and top-down. Although the representatives of Akbayan and a few other party-list groups were not able to convince all the conference participants to drop the idea of a constituent assembly altogether, the body recognized that “there is a strong sentiment in support of a Constitutional Convention.”<sup>78</sup>

Soon after the political parties conference, however, the House leadership reverted back to its constituent assembly position. De Venecia stepped up his cha-cha campaign, and he managed to win over many opposition lawmakers in both houses of Congress. Obviously hoping to gain the support of the federalists for his cha-cha initiative, De Venecia called for a shift to a federal form of government. In January 2003, Sen. Edgardo Angara, the main proponent of a constituent assembly in the upper house, very nearly succeeded in wresting the Senate presidency from Sen. Franklin Drilon.

Akbayan and other “Con-Con” (constitutional convention) advocates became increasingly concerned with the moves of the “Con-Ass” (constituent assembly) forces, which included four major political parties of the political elite. In Akbayan’s analysis, the Con-Ass forces wanted to change the system of government so that members of the House of Representatives would become the fulcrum of a new, parliamentary political system.<sup>79</sup> To try to stop the Con-Ass steamroller, Con-Con advocates banded together into a coalition in November 2002. The Citizens for Con-Con 2004 (CFC 04) consisted of three major formations: the Consortium for Constitutional Reform, a loose grouping of NGOs and political groups (including Akbayan) committed to working for charter reforms; the Citizens’ Movement for a Federalist Philippines, the main alliance of federalist groups; and Kilusang Pilipino, a multisectoral organization of concerned citizens. The coalition launched a campaign for a Con-Con in 2004, with the election of delegates to be held simultaneously with the May 2004

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<sup>77</sup> Representatives of political parties 2002, pp. 4-5.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

general elections.<sup>80</sup> In January 2003, soon after the failed “Senate coup,” the tide began to turn against the Con-Ass camp. Sen. Drilon, who in April 2002 had been for Con-Ass, solicited 14 signatures in the Senate for a Con-Con in 2004 resolution. Corazon Aquino and Cardinal Sin, moral leaders of the movement against Ramos’ and Estrada’s cha-cha, declared their opposition to Con-Ass. President Arroyo, who had announced in December 2002 her decision not to run in 2004, spoke out for a Con-Con too.<sup>81</sup> The politically influential religious groups Iglesia ni Cristo and El Shaddai opposed charter change, saying that the people would interpret any move to change the constitution, with the 2004 elections fast approaching, as an attempt by those in Congress to advance their vested interests. When the House passed a resolution in March 2003 calling on Congress to convene a Con-Ass, several networks of POs, NGOs and new left groups joined forces for an even broader movement, the People’s Coalition against Con-Ass, with CFC 04 at the core.<sup>82</sup> Through the rest of the year, the Con-Con advocates kept up with their campaign for a Con-Con in 2004.

The Con-Ass versus Con-Con contest of 2002-4 ended up with neither side really winning. In January 2004, De Venecia and the House of Representatives dropped their Con-Ass position and acceded to a Con-Con.<sup>83</sup> By then, however, with four months to go before elections, there was no more time left to work out a Con-Con bill and have it passed by both houses of Congress. The Con-Con advocates did manage to block Con-Ass, but they fell short of their main objective: a Con-Con in 2004.

Although Akbayan had been among those in the forefront of the campaign for a Con-Con, the whole issue of charter change proved a most contentious one within the party itself. There were members who felt that Akbayan should have rejected De Venecia’s cha-cha initiative from the outset. Others criticized weaknesses in the way Akbayan leaders had dealt with the *trapos* at the political parties’ summit, particularly in letting the endorsement for Arroyo’s medium-term development plan slip through. Defending Akbayan’s engagement in the cha-cha issue, Rocamora, its chairman in 2001-3, stated: “[I]f we had chosen to oppose cha-cha from the beginning, we would not have been in position to oppose and to succeed in opposing Con-Ass.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Rocamora 2003b, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> De Roma 2002, pp. 4-5.

<sup>81</sup> Rocamora 2003a, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Institute for Popular Democracy 2003a, pp. 1-2; Institute for Popular Democracy 2003b, p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> Pablo 2004, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Rocamora 2003b, p. 3.

## ***Whittling at Elite Rule through the Fight for Political Reform***

For over a decade now, the emergent left groups and allied POs/NGOs have been engaged in the fight for political reform. In the main, the reform measures pursued have been geared towards promoting people's participation and affirmative action for marginalized sectors and towards weakening oligarchic domination and manipulation of democratic processes and institutions. The emergent left groups' actions for political reform are reflective of an overall effort towards building a counter-hegemony against the oligarchic elite and towards transforming an elite-dominated democracy into a more participatory and egalitarian one.

Since 1995, important political reform measures have been passed – the party-list system, election modernization and absentee voting. The new left forces contributed, in varying degrees, to the enactment of these measures, and their contribution to the processes of other political reforms appears to be steadily increasing. Despite the many limitations of the party-list system, IPER executive director Ramon Casiple acknowledges that it has given marginalized and underrepresented sectors “a genuine doorway into the halls of power, albeit a small one.”<sup>85</sup> As mentioned earlier, election modernization still needs to be implemented. Absentee voting has just been introduced in the 2004 elections.

Although the emergent left groups vigorously opposed the moves for charter change of Presidents Ramos and Estrada and Speaker De Venecia, the hubbub over “cha-cha” provided an excellent opportunity for broad public discussion of constitutional reform. In 2002, the new left groups joined the broad movement that campaigned for a more democratic and participatory means of charter change: a constitutional convention instead of a constituent assembly. Going farther, right into the substantive issues, Akbayan pushed for a political reform measure that it believed would have a most profound impact on Philippine patronage politics: a shift to a parliamentary form of government with a system of proportional representation.

In going about their work for political reform, the emergent left groups have acquired a wealth of experience and developed some skills and sophistication. Prior to 1998, the new left groups and allied POs/NGOs pressed for reform from outside Congress by rallying in the streets and by lobbying. Employing programmatic demand making, they approached legislators and

other government officials, endorsing or proposing bills, a few times even drafting bills for them. After the first party-list ballot in 1998, the new left parties and groups began to participate directly in the deliberations and debates in Congress. They learned how to formulate and carry out plans and tactics on multiple lanes, how to combine and weave mass actions in the streets, various forms of advocacy – lobbying in person or sending letters, emails, faxes, etc., sometimes even from abroad – and debating on the Congress floor.

In the years ahead, the efforts of the emergent left groups for political reform are likely to continue to be directed towards fostering people's participation and breaking elite domination and manipulation. The political reform agenda of the new left groups would probably include measures that they have worked on in the past but that remain un-enacted or un-implemented. Somewhere at the top of the list would be the passage of local sectoral representation, and the long-delayed implementation of election modernization. Also high up in the agenda would be a measure for amending the party-list law to insure that the seats allotted by the constitution for party-list representatives are filled up.<sup>86</sup> Likely to be filed again are the anti-dynasty and anti-turncoatism bills, which are supposed to be simply enabling measures of constitutional provisions but which *trapos* have strongly resisted and successfully blocked in the past. The new left groups would probably bide their time and, before really pushing for these, make sure of mustering massive support.

After figuring prominently in three successive administrations, the “cha-cha” controversy is bound to erupt again within the next few years. It is likely to be in the nature of another Con-Ass versus Con-Con clash. In the event that the deadlock between Con-Ass and Con-Con advocates does get broken and the constitutional reform process (whether Con-Ass or Con-Con) does begin, the focus of the new left forces' endeavors in political reform would move to bigger issues like the shift to a parliamentary system with proportional representation.

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<sup>85</sup> Casiple 2003, p. 5.

<sup>86</sup> In the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress, party-list representatives managed to work out a consolidated bill for this purpose, HB 5081, but it did not reach floor deliberations.

## *Chapter VII*

### **Party Work at the Municipal Level**

To distinguish themselves from traditional parties, emergent parties of the left have endeavored, among other things, to build grassroots-based party organizations. This chapter discusses how one of these parties, Akbayan, has done this, particularly at the municipal and city levels. I focus on the municipal/city level because members of elite political families as well as traditional parties directly hold power usually at this level rather than in barangays. I first examine how Akbayan opened up new areas for the party's expansion, then study its engagement in civil society, governance and elections at the municipal/city level and to some extent, the barangay level; look into how it builds local party units; and finally, make a schematic presentation of how Akbayan builds a politico-electoral base at the local level.

In my fieldwork in 2002, I chose to go to municipalities and cities in which left parties had fielded or endorsed local candidates that had won. I wanted to examine the left parties' engagements not just in the mass movement and in elections (both party-list and local), but also in local government work and governance, and the interweaving of these engagements, plus the setting up of the local party organization. I covered a good number of municipalities and cities, and a few "belts" (clusters of municipalities with some common or shared characteristics). The municipalities and cities I covered in which Akbayan endorsed or fielded winning local candidates were: Los Baños and Victoria in Laguna province; Daraga, Albay; Sulat, Eastern Samar; Jagna, Bohol; Surallah, South Cotabato; Davao City; and Cotabato City. The belts with Akbayan-endorsed local officials were: southeastern Samar (specifically the municipalities of Guiuan, Mercedes, Salcedo and Hernani); the western part of Davao Oriental (Banaybanay, San Isidro and Governor Generoso); and the Iranun areas of Maguindanao (Buldon, Matanog and Barira).

Among the salient findings of my field research on Akbayan's political work at the municipal/city level were the following:

- In opening up new areas for expansion, Akbayan has not just relied on the usual NGO-PO combination (or the "civil society route") but has also employed other methods – the now more common "LGU route" and, in Muslim areas, "clan-based" organizing.
- Although Akbayan has come from the "mass movement" tradition and continues to be very much involved in contentious politics, much more of the party's energies at the local level has actually been devoted to local governance (especially people's participation in governance), development work and preparing for elections.
- Akbayan's engagement in development work has converged with its engagement in local governance; programs such as SIAD and BDP-PRA have contributed immensely to Akbayan's deepening engagement in local governance.
- Akbayan has successfully devised means for foiling or countering various forms of *trapo* dirty tricks during elections; however, it still has not developed effective ways for stopping vote-buying and NPA harassment.
- In many areas, local party activists, too preoccupied with their particular tasks and concerns, have at times failed to give due attention to building and strengthening the party organization.
- The process of transforming a *trapo*-controlled area into an Akbayan political-electoral base calls for integrated efforts in civil society, in the LGU and in party-building.

### ***Opening Up New Areas for the Party***

When Aksyon/Akbayan started out, its members came mostly from left "political blocs" (Bisig, the "popdems," Pandayan and Siglaya) and the POs/NGOs and social movements aligned with, or sympathetic to, these blocs. In areas where the "political blocs" had already been engaged in organizing work, their chapters and units became, or were integrated into, Aksyon/Akbayan chapters. Usually, a local chapter of a political bloc had a network of local

POs/NGOs allied with it. Bisig, Pandayan and Siglaya (later replaced by Padayan) maintained themselves as political blocs within Aksyon/Akbayan.

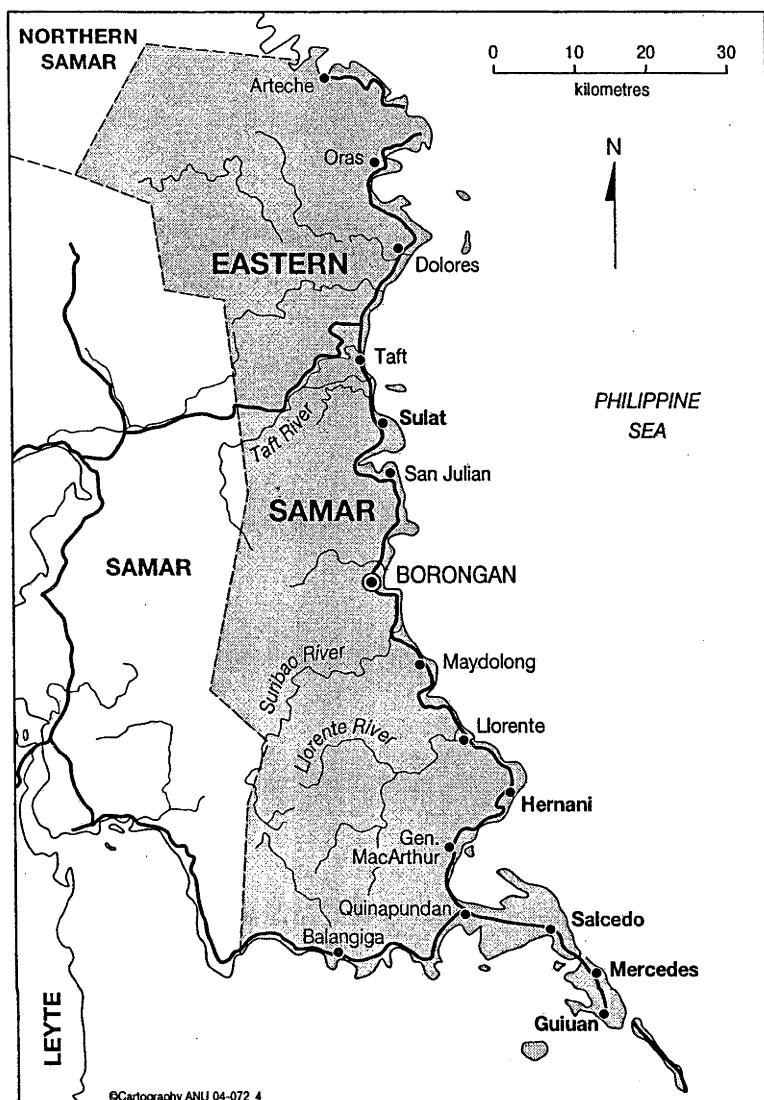
In its formative years, Aksyon/Akbayan opened up many new areas – municipalities or barangays where no chapters or units of the party or of the political blocs existed – mainly via the “civil society route”: Akbayan members working with an Akbayan-aligned NGO or national PO federation simply combined party organizing with PO organizing or PO/NGO-related work. To local residents, they usually introduced themselves as NGO personnel and initially did only NGO-related work. Only after some time of local integration would they identify themselves as Akbayan members and engage in Akbayan organizing too. Akbayan has also tried and developed other means for expanding into new areas, such as the “LGU route” (combining party organizing with LGU or LGU-related work) and “clan-based organizing.” Recruitment into Akbayan is a relatively easy process. A person who wishes to join only has to be a registered voter, to be endorsed by the chapter to which he/she will belong, and to complete the party’s basic orientation seminar, usually a one-day affair, which consists of discussions on the national situation and on Akbayan’s constitution and program. The more crucial point is whether the new recruit truly becomes an active member.

This section focuses on the opening of new areas; party consolidation is discussed in the latter part of the chapter.

#### *Expansion through the “Civil Society Route”: Southeastern Samar and Victoria, Laguna*

Akbayan took the traditional (i.e., for left parties and movements) “civil society route” – combining party organizing with PO/NGO work – in expanding to several municipalities in southeastern Samar, the lower half of Eastern Samar province, and to the municipality of Victoria in Laguna province. In Eastern Samar, one of the most impoverished and neglected provinces in central Philippines, Akbayan started out in the municipalities of General MacArthur, Salcedo and Mercedes, where there were former ND activists who were organizing barangay health workers and women’s health associations for a government project on traditional medicine funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and who remained in touch with some NGO-based Akbayan members in Manila and Tacloban, Leyte. The former NDs joined and campaigned for Akbayan in the middle of the 1998 electoral campaign. In



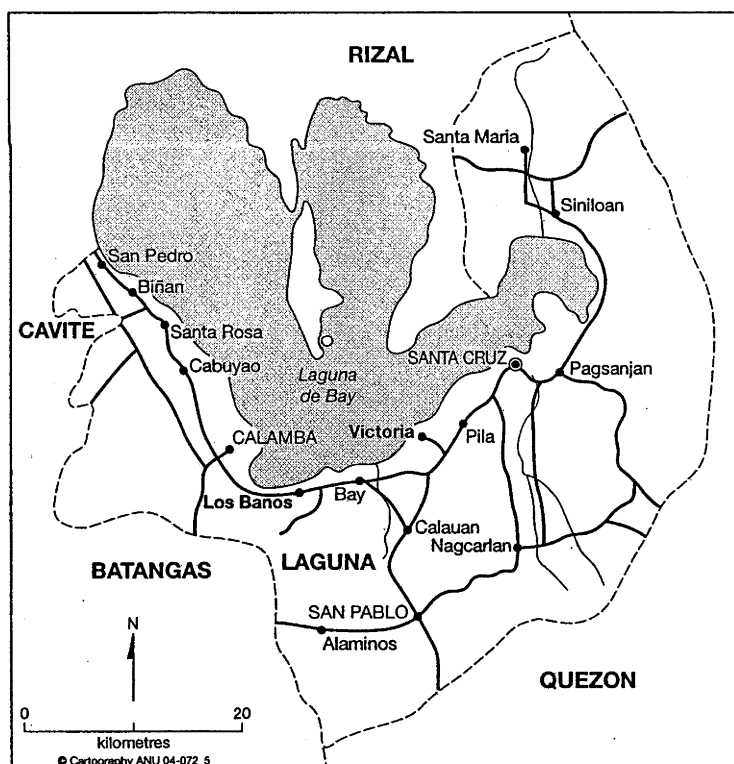


**Map of Eastern Samar province, showing  
Guiuan, Hernani, Mercedes, Salcedo and Sulat.**

June 1998, to continue the organizing work and trainings of the traditional medicine project, which had just ended, some of the personnel set up Pneuma, Inc. From being a health NGO, Pneuma evolved into an NGO promoting “popular empowerment and development” and moved into other concerns like local governance, agrarian reform and rural development, and environmental protection. With the assistance of the Pneuma staff, Akbayan later expanded to the nearby municipalities of Guiuan, Hernani, Quinapondan, Balangiga and Llorente, all in southeastern Samar, but this time by combining party-building with both PO/NGO and LGU work.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Rodol Mercado, executive director, Pneuma, Inc., 12 November 2002, in Guiuan, Eastern Samar.

In February 1999, the Bisig-linked Center for Agrarian Reform Empowerment and Transformation (Caret) assigned two community organizers, who were also Akbayan members, to Victoria, a fifth-class municipality, one of Laguna's poorest. The two organizers helped local women, peasants and fisherfolk set up or reinvigorate POs. In the original plan, a municipal federation would be formed once there were enough POs, and this would be followed by Akbayan organizing. In the latter half of 2000, however, the Caret tandem undertook Akbayan organizing earlier, in preparation for the May 2001 congressional and local elections. By early 2001, there were Akbayan chapters in all the nine barangays of Victoria. By then too, there were sixteen POs, new or newly reactivated, mostly barangay-based. In April 2001, the POs forged a federation, *Ugnayan ng mga Mamamayan Tungo sa Kaunlaran ng Victoria* (People's Coordinating Council for the Development of Victoria). In all the flurry of the electoral campaign, the distinction between Akbayan and Ugnayan-Victoria became somewhat blurred, a problem that took some time to iron out after the elections.<sup>2</sup>



Map of Laguna province,  
showing Los Baños and Victoria

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Nick Soriano, community organizer, Center for Agrarian Reform Empowerment and Transformation (Caret), Victoria, Laguna, 5 February 2002, in Victoria, and 29 November 2002, in Quezon City.

*Expansion through the “LGU Route”: Los Baños, Laguna; Daraga, Albay; Jagna, Bohol; and Banaybanay and Governor Generoso, Davao Oriental*

Apart from the “purely” civil society method for opening new areas, Aksyon/Akbayan, usually with NGO assistance, has also combined party organizing with work within local governments or with programs involving partnerships between POs/NGOs and LGUs. Training programs related to barangay governance, conducted in coordination with allied NGOs, e.g., Basic Orientation on Barangay Governance (BOBG) and Barangay Development Planning through Participatory Resource Appraisal (BDP-PRA), have proven to be particularly helpful in Akbayan’s expansion efforts. Akbayan is apparently the first political party to conduct programs for “good governance” and “people’s participation in governance” at the barangay level on a national scale. In many regions (e.g. Southern Mindanao, Eastern Visayas and Bicol), the “LGU route” is now turning out to be Akbayan’s principal means for moving into new areas.

Neither Aksyon/Akbayan nor any of the political blocs aligned with it were involved in the initial grassroots organizing in Los Baños, Laguna, a town 63 km. South of Metro Manila, a center for scientific research. In 1995-98, the Evelio B. Javier Foundation, a development NGO, undertook a project in Los Baños called “Promoting Local Initiatives for Democracy and Justice” (Prodem), with funding from USAID, to enhance the capability of LGUs and facilitate citizen participation in local governance. Prodem workers helped build POs and eventually a coalition of 79 local POs/NGOs called *Ugnayan ng mga Samahang Pamayanan ng Los Baños* (Ugnayan-LB or Coordinating Council of Community Organizations of Los Baños). They also propagated participatory development planning. In 1997, the Los Baños LGU and Ugnayan-LB collaborated to make the town’s 25-year comprehensive development plan – “a milestone in LGU-NGO/PO relations.”<sup>3</sup> The Metro Manila-based, Aksyon-linked Institute of Politics and Governance (IPG) assisted Prodem workers train local officials and residents to do community-based development planning. In the process, some Prodem workers, barangay officials and leaders and members of Ugnayan-LB and its affiliate POs/NGOs joined Aksyon. After the Prodem project finished, IPG helped to establish the People’s Institute for Local Governance Advocacy and Research (Pilar) to continue assisting local government officials and residents in capability-building and promoting participatory governance in Los Baños and to

extend similar services to other municipalities of Laguna.<sup>4</sup> While Prodem had helped mainly in municipal development planning, Pilar focused on barangay development planning.

The first members of Aksyon/Akbayan in Daraga, Albay,<sup>5</sup> a scenic town adjacent to Legazpi City and at the foot of Mayon volcano, trace their initial exposure to “new politics” to a seminar on electoral campaign management and barangay administration conducted by a Metro Manila-based “popdem” NGO, Education for Life Foundation (ELF) in 1997. One of the earliest in the Batman series, the seminar was mainly intended for candidates in the barangay elections, but it also drew some leaders of community organizations. After the elections, the participants, including some winning candidates, intensified PO building and endeavored to implement “people’s participation in governance.” With Akbayan members in Daraga taking the lead, the regional organization of Akbayan for Bicol was set up in Pili, Albay in December 1997, a few weeks before Akbayan’s national founding congress.<sup>6</sup>

Two Akbayan members, both former NDs, working with the Center for Politics, Governance and Development (CPGD) in Tagbilaran, Bohol province,<sup>7</sup> invited a former colleague, Exuperio “Eksam” Lloren, from Jagna, a small port town in southeastern Bohol, to a Batman “trainors’ training” seminar in 1999. Lloren, a former student activist, NPA commander and political detainee who later opted to go into public office “to continue working for the masses,” had been elected barangay captain in 1997 and then Jagna municipal councilor the next year. Meanwhile, in Davao Oriental province,<sup>8</sup> personnel of the Bisig-linked People’s Alternative Development Center (PADC) established initial contact, on separate occasions, with two former diocesan priests, Vice-Mayor Jose Learito Otig of Banaybanay and Jerry Dela Cerna of Governor Generoso, who had narrowly lost in their 1992 and 1998 mayoralty bids, respectively. With their experience in church social action, Otig and Dela Cerna were oriented towards serving the poor, deprived and oppressed. Prior to his entry into politics, Dela Cerna had been very active in the environmental movement, organizing mass protests against illegal logging. PADC arranged for the two of them, together with

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<sup>3</sup> Martinez 2001, pp. 15-18.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Conrad Castillo, chairperson, board of directors, People’s Institute for Local Governance Advocacy and Research (Pilar), 25 November 2002, in Quezon City.

<sup>5</sup> See map of Albay province on p. 177.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Marlene Magayanes, municipal councilor, Daraga, Albay, 30 March 2002, in Quezon City, and 5 November 2002, in Daraga.

<sup>7</sup> See map of Bohol province on p. 257.

<sup>8</sup> See map of Davao Oriental province on p. 255.

other local leaders in Banaybanay and Governor Generoso, to attend Batman trainings in Lake Sebu, South Cotabato, and in Davao City in 1999. Convinced about Akbayan's platform of new politics and participatory governance, most of the Batman seminar participants in Tagbilaran, Lake Sebu and Davao, including Lloren, Otig and Dela Cerna, joined the party and proceeded to push for participatory governance in their respective municipalities.<sup>9</sup>

*Expansion through Clan-Based Organizing: Buldon, Matanog and Barira, Maguindanao*

To expand into the Muslim municipalities of Buldon, Matanog and Barira, Maguindanao,<sup>10</sup> used clans rather than NGOs and POs. Inhabited mainly by the Iranun people,<sup>11</sup> much of the area of the three municipalities had constituted the famed Camp Abubakar, the main camp of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the 1980s and 90s. All three belong to the sixth-class category, i.e., municipalities with the lowest income in the entire country. In the late 1980s, CPP-NPA cadres in Maguindanao discovered that the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and then later the MILF had mainly worked through the traditional clan structure in organizing their units and base support. The CPP-NPA tried clan-based organizing in Muslim and *lumad* communities in the Central Mindanao Region (CMR) with some success, but the regional party organization broke away from the CPP-NPA in 1993 during the party split. One of the CMR cadres, Roy Delima, used the clan-based method in helping build "agrarian reform communities" (ARCs) in the Camp Abubakar area in the mid-1990s. After establishing and developing ties with local MNLF leaders and the Sultan Kudarat Descendants Organization of the Philippines (SKDOP), he managed to form a core group consisting of three former MNLF commanders and a datu. The group drew entire clans into the ARC project. From the MNLF and SKDOP networks, the group expanded to the MILF mass base, again mainly through blood lines. When Delima joined Aksyon in 1996, he convinced the clans in the ARC project to go with him. They continued with clan-based organizing,

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<sup>9</sup> Interviews with Exuperio Lloren, mayor, Jagna, Bohol, 19 and 21 May 2002, in Jagna; Jose Learth Otig, vice-mayor, Banaybanay, Davao Oriental, 10 July 2002, in Banaybanay; and Jerry dela Cerna, mayor, Governor Generoso, Davao Oriental, 3 July 2002, in Governor Generoso. Otig succumbed to a heart attack in September 2003.

<sup>10</sup> See map of Maguindanao province on page 247.

<sup>11</sup> The Iranun people live in areas along the border of the provinces of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur, which are predominantly populated by the Maguindanaoans and the Maranaws.

this time for Aksyon/Akbayan. The MNLF and the MILF did not mind Akbayan recruiting members from their mass bases. As far they were concerned, there was no conflict of interest – they were armed liberation movements, Akbayan was an electoral party that recognized the right of the Moro people to self-determination.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Engagement in Civil Society at the Municipal/City Level***

Moving from one area to another in the course of my fieldwork, I observed that Akbayan's engagement in civil society at the local level – organizing POs, promoting popular movements, development work, preparing for elections, etc. – was mainly directed at the poorer classes and marginalized sectors. In most of the rural areas I visited, the emphasis was often on peasants or fisherfolk. In Davao City and in plantation areas in Davao del Sur, Akbayan and allied NGOs put stress on organizing industrial, transport and plantation workers.<sup>13</sup> Local PO organizers who were also Akbayan organizers in Daraga, Mercedes and Victoria were particularly successful in building women's POs.<sup>14</sup> In Paquibato, a rural district of Davao City, and in San Isidro, Akbayan, in coordination with the Pandayan-aligned NGO Pakisama, assisted peasants in building cooperatives.<sup>15</sup> Akbayan was very much involved in integrated area development in the Iranun areas of Maguindanao.<sup>16</sup> By working among peasants, workers, women, fisherfolk and urban poor and in Moro communities, Akbayan could indeed lay claim to being a party of and for the poor and the marginalized. However, I found Akbayan surprisingly weak in the community- or barangay-based youth sector, and, as far as I had observed, it had not yet significantly ventured into organizing work among non-Muslim indigenous peoples.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Roy Delima, chairperson, Mindanao Commission, Akbayan, 31 July 2002, in Digos, Davao del Sur. The MNLF and the MILF, in fact, do not feel threatened at all by legal electoral parties working and recruiting in their midst. Most Muslim politicians are members of the country's main traditional parties and they sometimes "recruit" those who support them into these parties. Their "recruits" often remain nominal party members. The MNLF and the MILF, however, resist the entry of parties or politicians with armed groups, e.g., the CPP-NPA, and warlords (Christian and Muslim) with private armies, into their areas when they can.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Michael Ibañez, secretary-general, Davao region, Bisig, 8 August 2002, in Davao City.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews with Magayanes and Soriano; interview with Fe Barsaba, municipal councilor, Mercedes, Eastern Samar, 13 November 2002, in Guiuan, Eastern Samar.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Ma. Louise Lampon, area coordinator, Southeastern Mindanao, Pakisama, 6 August 2002, in Davao City.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Delima.

Styles and methods of doing grassroots work varied from place to place, depending a lot on which political bloc was involved and which NGO or PO federation Akbayan worked closely with. On the whole, Akbayan activists appeared to be adept at conducting political education or skills training seminars and workshops. Despite their limited resources, local Akbayan organizers often managed to keep a good balance between such “sweeping” activities and follow-up “solid” organizing work. PO-building usually proceeded on a sectoral basis, except in the case of cooperatives. Multisectoral federations or coalitions of local POs emerged in areas where a number of POs had already been set up, e.g. Ugnayan-Los Banos and Ugnayan-Victoria. Or a council of PO leaders and local officials, such as the Bicol Grassroots Leaders for Empowerment and Development (Biglead) in Daraga.

I did come across, however, some areas where PO-building seemed not to have made much progress. Despite left parties and movements in the Philippines having been very much associated with POs, there were Akbayan areas with hardly any progressive POs. Akbayan had been active in Surallah and Jagna for several years, yet almost all of the local societal organizations in these two municipalities were of the traditional type (religious, civic, school and sports associations). Why were there hardly any progressive POs? In Surallah, one factor was a relatively weak Akbayan chapter. The Akbayan organization in Jagna, however, was relatively strong and active. Probing deeper, I found out that Akbayan had expanded to Surallah and Jagna mainly through the “LGU route,” and that Akbayan members in Jagna had been recruited mainly from political society (i.e., the barangay and municipal governmental structures and the traditional political parties), not civil society.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, I found out that in some areas opened via the “LGU route,” Akbayan and allied NGOs had not been able to work out programs for community organizing to complement or to immediately follow BOBG and BDP-PRA trainings.

Regional and local NGOs, usually based in regional and provincial centers, extended support services to grassroots organizing, to the popular movements and to development- and local governance-related work. I observed that the regional and local NGOs with which Akbayan worked closely were one or

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Benjamin Sumog-oy, executive director, Building Alternative Rural Resource Institutions and Organizing Services (Barrios), and member, Akbayan National Council, 20 November 2002, in Davao City; interview with Elaine Teope, member, National Council, Akbayan, 18 March 2002, in Quezon City. A notable exception in Surallah is the Allah Valley Development Foundation, Inc., a social development NGO that “provides services in strengthening and sustaining cooperatives and people’s organizations.”

a combination of the following types: 1) peasant NGOs, which assisted in organizing peasants, fisherfolk and rural women and youth, and were active in advocacy for agrarian reform and rural development; 2) labor NGOs, which helped organize urban and farm workers and advance the trade union movement; 3) development NGOs, which promoted programs ranging from simple livelihood projects to SIAD programs; and 4) local governance-related NGOs, which conducted trainings and seminars on progressive “good governance,” “people’s participation in governance,” etc. Because of the fast increasing demand for support services, more and more development and governance NGOs were being set up on the provincial or even sub-provincial level. Moreover, the distinction between development and governance NGOs tended to disappear as development NGOs ventured more and more into governance-related concerns, and governance NGOs, into development work. I found no local NGOs specifically for the women’s movement. Governance-related NGOs took care of seminars on “women in governance”; development NGOs, “gender and development.” Neither were there regional or local NGOs for the youth and student movement.

In line with the thrust of “democratic participation in governance,” Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs have worked for the accreditation of local POs/NGOs with the government bodies concerned, for more joint undertakings between POs/NGOs and LGUs, and for the participation of POs/NGOs in local governance, especially in the local special bodies of LGUs, such as the local development councils and the local prequalification, bids and awards committee. In some areas, however, I observed that the participation of POs/NGOs in local governance was still quite limited. In San Isidro, for instance, leaders of peasant cooperatives aligned with Akbayan were not very active in local development planning. Sounding somewhat apologetic, the representative of a local servicing NGO, who was also an Akbayan officer, explained that the cooperatives concerned still had not yet had seminars on “democratic participation of governance.”<sup>18</sup> In some other areas, however, the problem was the opposite: POs/NGOs had become so assertive that they sometimes made demands that even progressive local officials, including some Akbayan members, found way beyond the local government’s capacities to meet.<sup>19</sup>

As to be expected of a political party that has come out of the social movements, Aksyon/Akbayan has been very much engaged in, and identified

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Lampon.



with, “pressure” or “contentious politics.” In such major urban centers as Metro Manila, Metro Cebu and Davao City, Akbayan and POs/NGOs linked with it have frequently launched mass protest or advocacy actions over a wide range of national and local issues. By no means, however, has Akbayan’s pressure or contentious politics been limited to major urban centers. In 2000-1, local activists and members of Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs in such remote places as Guiuan and Governor Generoso, for instance, launched a series of mass protest actions to stop the environmentally destructive practices of a mining firm in Manicani Island (a part of Guiuan municipality) and logging companies in Governor Generoso.<sup>20</sup>

Many Akbayan activists and members, especially in the urban areas, tend to see their party as being mainly in the “mass movement” mode, a party whose political activities revolve around mass actions and campaigns, especially of the protest or advocacy type. This self-perception, it turns out, is not too accurate. In the course of studying Akbayan’s activities at the local level, I noticed that Akbayan cadres and activists in many areas actually did *not* devote much time and effort on pressure or contentious politics, and were in fact much more involved in such other concerns as development work, local governance (especially people’s participation in governance) and preparing for elections.

Upon closer examination, I discerned a difference in priorities in urban and rural “civil society” work. Cadres and activists in major urban areas tended to put the stress in their “civil society” work on contentious type of actions, and those in rural areas (except some plantation areas and agrarian reform “hotspots”), on development work and people’s participation in governance. Urban activists were often called upon, and felt compelled, to articulate and project the party’s positions on national, sectoral and local issues and developments. While being centers of the mass movement, urban centers nonetheless also played a significant role in non-contentious aspect of Akbayan’s politics: as national or regional hubs in the party’s efforts vis-à-vis development work and local governance. Both urban and rural activists paid attention to preparing for elections, but rural activists seemed to have more time in their hands for this as they did not have to engage in mass protest actions as often as their urban counterparts did.

It was but logical for contentious type of actions – rallies, marches, pickets, etc. – to gravitate towards urban centers, where the main institutions

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Dela Cerna; interview with Javier Zacate, mayor, Sulat, Eastern Samar, 16 June 2002, in Sulat.

and offices of government, the churches, academe, mass media, etc., were located. I noted, however, that many Akbayan cadres and activists were not too conscious about, and sensitive to, the difference in urban and rural priorities. Moreover, I observed that the time and energy of Akbayan national leaders often tended to be drawn to, and caught up in, the exciting, fast-paced contentious politics in the major urban centers, sometimes at the expense of the mundane, slow-paced, not-too-contentious concerns of those working in the rural areas. This was especially true during times when “urgent” national issues and developments, which called for decisive and sharply formulated responses, came in quick succession.

Below is a brief presentation of Akbayan’s engagement in pressure or contentious politics in two urban centers outside of Metro Manila. Case examples of the engagement of Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs in development work will be discussed in the section on Akbayan’s engagement in local governance as the party’s development and governance work have tended to converge.

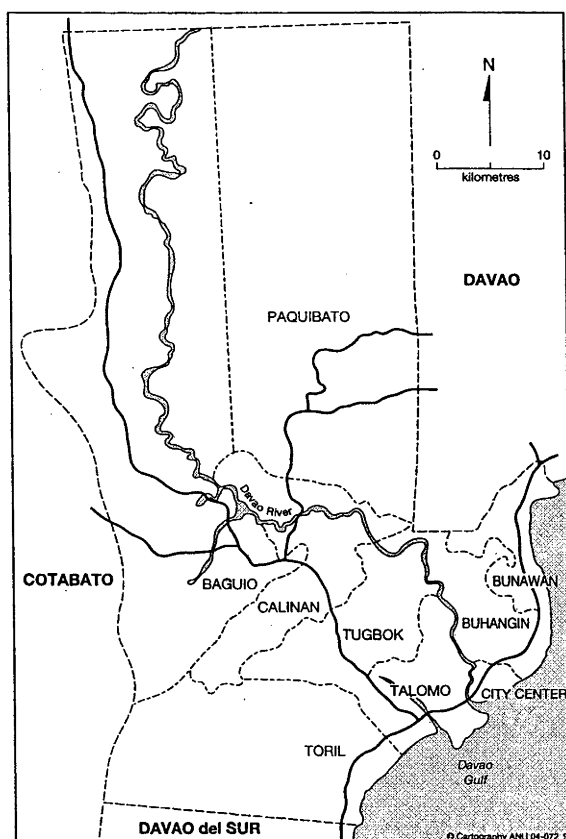
#### *Regional Centers for the Mass Movement and Development Work: Davao City and Cotabato City*

Davao City is Mindanao’s biggest city and Southern Mindanao’s regional capital; Cotabato City is the seat of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). For Akbayan, Davao City and Cotabato City are not only important centers of the mass movement, but also vital regional hubs for its development initiatives.

Davao City has long been a hive of political activism. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was the scene of many rallies and marches on land-related issues as well as on “imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism.” During the Marcos era, it became a hotbed of political and armed resistance against the dictatorship. In 1984-85, protesters led by the radical left, i.e., the NDs, paralyzed the entire city several times with *welgang bayan* (a form of general strike). Since the fall of Marcos, the NDs have weakened in Davao City, as in most of the country. With the CPP-NPA managing to maintain guerrilla zones in Davao City’s rugged hinterland,<sup>21</sup> the NDs continue to be the main left force in the city as a whole. Other left parties and groups, such as Akbayan, Sanlakas, *Partido ng Manggagawa* and *Alab Katipunan* and POs/NGOs aligned with

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<sup>20</sup> Interviews with Mercado and Dela Cerna.



**Map of Davao City, showing its districts.**

them, however, have remained active, especially in the *poblacion* and the coastal parts of city.

Akbayan, in particular, appears to have made significant strides in PO-building as well as party recruitment among workers, urban poor and students. Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs, often in coordination with other “democratic left” groups, have launched mass protest or advocacy actions in the city over a wide range of national and local issues – the war in Mindanao, workers’ rights, oil price hikes, land reform, debt, indigenous peoples’ issues, human rights, environment, etc. In annual Labor Day rallies in Davao, Akbayan-linked workers’ organizations, particularly those in the local APL and CIU networks and now grouped under the Workers’ Council of Davao City, have come up with large mobilizations, outstripping those of the KMU.<sup>22</sup> Akbayan-aligned NGOs based in Davao City serve as regional centers for development work. Until 2003, the PADC, established in 1999, covered the four Davao provinces and Davao City

<sup>21</sup> In terms of land area (2,444 sq. kms.), Davao City is one of the world’s largest cities. Close to fifty per cent of this land area, however, is classified as timberland or forest.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Ibañez.

itself.<sup>23</sup> The SIAD Initiatives in Mindanao – Convergence for Agrarian Reform and Regional Development (SIM-CARRD), established in 2001, now serves as a coordinating center for SIAD and other development initiatives in Mindanao and as the secretariat of the Batman Consortium in Mindanao.<sup>24</sup> Sectoral POs/NGOs aligned with Akbayan, engaged in both contentious politics and development work, such as the labor NGO, LEARN, and the peasant federation PAKISAMA, also have regional offices in Davao City. Akbayan members in Davao City are also active in the regional formations of such broad alliances of left and progressive groups as the FDC and the Gathering for Peace.<sup>25</sup> Akbayan-linked POs/NGOs work closely with Akbayan national council member Peter Laviña, a former newsman who was elected a Davao City councilor in 2001 and reelected in 2004.

In the late 1990s, Akbayan established a strong presence in Cotabato City, with an extensive network of allied organizations (Christian and Muslim) in the urban poor and student sectors. As in Davao City, the local Akbayan organization and allied POs/NGOs in Cotabato City were very active in mass actions and campaigns on national and local issues. Of particular concern was the issue of the war in Mindanao. Being only fifty kilometers away from Camp Abubakar, the MILF's national headquarters, Cotabato City could not but be greatly affected by the war. Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs joined human rights, church, Islamic and other groups in opposing the government's hardline position towards the Muslim rebel movements and in undertaking various peace initiatives. When Estrada declared an all-out war against the MILF, a broad coalition of groups, including Akbayan, staged large protest actions in Cotabato City. To assist 13,000 families displaced by the war, Akbayan launched a relief and rehabilitation campaign and was one of the few groups that managed to reach far-flung areas.<sup>26</sup> Shortly after the 2001 elections, Akbayan-Cotabato City suffered a serious setback when one of its influential local leaders, Noel Pelonco, a legal consultant for the urban

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Edwin Mayormita, executive director, People's Alternative Development Center (PADC), 3 August 2002, in Davao City. PADC personnel often had to travel long distances, partly on bad roads, to get to project sites – a tiring and expensive routine. In July 2003, PADC focused its attention on just one province, Davao Oriental, and shifted base to Banaybanay. (Interview with Delima, 26 October 2003, in Davao City.)

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Delima, 26 October 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Peter Laviña, city councilor, Davao City, 18 August 2002, in Davao City.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Abdurahman D. Macabangon, chairperson, Maguindanao division, Akbayan, 19 July 2002 in Cotabato City. By an odd twist, Akbayan's ID card became some sort of a pass at military checkpoints in the war-affected areas. AFP soldiers demanded some form of identification from those wishing to pass through. Very few local residents had *cedulas* (residence certificates), which required a fee. It so happened that Akbayan had issued ID cards to its local members. They were virtually the only ones around with ID cards. When some Akbayan members were able to use their party ID

poor, who had been elected city councilor in 1998 and 2001, ceased to be active in the party, and many of his supporters followed suit.<sup>27</sup> With its base in the urban poor communities greatly weakened, Akbayan has not been as active in pressure politics as before. NGOs linked with it, however, have persisted in development work, notably the Institute for Strategic Initiatives (ISI), which extends support services to development initiatives in the former Camp Abubakar area, and Solidarity for Peace, Empowerment and Equity-led Development (Speed), which gives trainings on community organizing and democratic participation in governance in different areas in the provinces of Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Engagement in Municipal/City Governance***

As mentioned in Chapter V, Akbayan remained largely un-engaged, or only peripherally engaged, in municipal and city governance in 1998-2002 even though some progressive local candidates who were sympathetic to it or even members of it had won in the 1998 and 2001 elections. Until December 2002, the progressive LGU officials performed their governmental functions largely on their own, without much help from Akbayan. Certain initiatives of Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs – SIAD projects, programs related to participatory barangay governance, PO/NGO participation in local special bodies, programs on women in governance, etc. – did intersect with municipal governance but did not get into the main run of it. Some Akbayan chapters and divisions (such as those in Los Baños, Daraga, Banaybanay, Governor Generoso and southeastern Samar), however, strove to learn the ropes of good, progressive governance at the municipal level by themselves.

In the course of my fieldwork, I observed that Akbayan's engagement in development work was no longer limited to working with progressive societal organizations but was getting more and more intertwined with local governance, both at the barangay and, however limited initially, at the municipal level. It used to be that in undertaking development initiatives, left groups and allied

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cards to get through the checkpoints, other residents soon wanted to become members of Akbayan too.

<sup>27</sup> Local Akbayan leaders complained that Pelonco had not really campaigned hard for Akbayan in 1998 and 2001, and that he wanted his own way and no longer abided by the decisions of the local Akbayan division. (Interview with Jonathan Cortez, officer-in-charge, Solidarity for Peace, Empowerment and Equity-led Development, 23 July 2002, in Cotabato City.)

<sup>28</sup> Interviews with Suharto M. Ambolodto, executive director, Institute for Strategic Initiatives, 21 July, 2002, in Cotabato City; and with Cortez.

POs/NGOs avoided linking up with LGUs for fear of being caught up in government bureaucracy or being co-opted by the *trapos*. Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs realized, however, that for their SIAD and other development initiatives to really succeed, they needed to work more closely with LGUs. Thus, more and more, the development projects became joint PO/NGO/Akbayan and LGU projects. Akbayan's engagement in development work was no longer just limited to the realm of civil society, but now extended to the state. Programs related to people's participation in governance, especially BDP-PRA, further reinforced the LGU aspect in development work. In working with LGUs on development projects, Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs gravitated towards, and later more actively sought out, progressive LGU officials, i.e. local "state reformists." In the process of cooperation, relations between Akbayan and these officials drew closer. Not surprisingly, many of them joined the party.

Through 1998-2002, the pressure built up for a more serious and comprehensive engagement of Akbayan in municipal/city governance. The number of Akbayan members and allies among local state reformists was fast increasing, as a result of Akbayan's engagement not just in the mass movement and in elections, but also – and most especially – in local governance and development concerns like BDP-PRA and SIAD. Attracted to Akbayan's program of "new politics," these local state reformists strove to inject "new politics" in their own work in government and looked for political direction and leadership. As early as 1999, Akbayan and the POs/NGOs involved in Batman had already seen the need to scale up Batman's ambit from barangay to municipal/city governance. Only in late 2002, however, did Akbayan decisively do so, as explained in Chapter V.

Only lately have leading Akbayan members become more conscious of the various competing theoretical perspectives in local governance – "revisionist neoliberal," "post-Marxist," "radical democratic," "revolutionary," etc. – and of the importance of making distinctions among them and taking a choice. As mentioned in Chapter V, Akbayan appears to be opting for the radical democratic perspective and is beginning to realize the danger of being used or co-opted by *trapos* if it does not make a clear distinction between its perspective, on one hand, and the *trapos*' "patrimonial" approach and the technocrats' "revisionist neoliberal" perspective, on the other.

Akbayan's engagement in local governance in Los Banos, Laguna, started at the barangay level and then proceeded to the municipal level.

Unlike its predecessor, Prodem, which had assisted in LGU capability-building at the municipal level, Pilar, the Akbayan-aligned, Los Baños-based NGO, focused on capability-building at the barangay level. Soon after it was established in July 1999, Pilar undertook BOBG and BDP-PRA trainings and PO-building in three pilot areas (one barangay each in Los Baños, Bae and San Pedro). Pilar signed memorandums of agreement with barangay LGUs, whereby the former would facilitate development planning activities and the latter would mobilize the various sectors of the community. From the pilot barangay of Tadalac, Pilar extended its trainings and organizing work to the thirteen other barangays of Los Baños.<sup>29</sup> The stresses in Pilar's organizing efforts per barangay depended on the particular characteristics of the barangay. In lakeside Tadalac, the focus was on women and fisherfolk; in Bagong Silang atop Mt. Makiling, farmers, women and youth. Alongside Pilar's efforts in PO building, Akbayan organized party chapters in BDP-PRA areas.<sup>30</sup>

The barangay captain of Tadalac illustrated just how much of a difference a participatory process of development planning had made. "In the past," he recalled, "only the barangay captain and the barangay council were involved in making the barangay development plan. We were told before that ninety per cent of Tadalac's [adult] residents were fisherfolk. Our old plan was based on that. BDP-PRA showed that the percentage was much lower: 42 percent!"<sup>31</sup>

For the upland farmers of Bagong Silang, BDP-PRA proved crucial to the very survival of their community. The University of the Philippines, which managed the Makiling Forest Reserve, had formulated a 25-year master plan for the conservation of Mt. Makiling without involving them in the planning process. They feared that an accreditation process for determining "legitimate" forest occupants stipulated in the plan could lead to undue demolitions and resettlements, especially in areas deemed "critical." The barangay officials and residents of Bagong Silang seized upon the opportunity provided by the BDP-PRA process to fight for their inclusion in the management of the Makiling

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Helene Aquino, program coordinator, Pilar, 27 November 2002, Quezon City.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Castillo.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Maximino D. Erasga, barangay captain, Tadalac, Los Banos, Laguna, 8 February 2002, Calamba, Laguna.

Forest Reserve and in the control of its resources and to show their capability in drawing up concrete measures for protecting the forest through sustainable resource use.<sup>32</sup>

One of the local officials who was very supportive of Prodem's and Pilar's initiatives was Caesar P. Perez, barangay captain of Batong Malake. Under twelve years of Perez's leadership, Batong Malake had become a bustling and commercially successful barangay.<sup>33</sup> Well respected by his peers, Perez had been elected president of the barangay captains of Los Baños, and then of the entire province. In the course of working closely with Prodem and Pilar, Perez came into contact with members of Akbayan who were involved in these NGOs. He joined Akbayan in late 2000. In the 2001 elections, Akbayan endorsed Perez for mayor and Matilde Erasga, a local leader of the women's movement and Akbayan member, for municipal councilor. Both ran under PPC and campaigned for Akbayan in the party-list vote. During the campaign, Perez's supporters stressed his performance in public office. Various irregularities marred the elections: tampered voters' lists, which resulted in many "flying voters" (voting non-residents) as well as disenfranchised residents, and vote-buying. Nonetheless, Perez, who was popular among both the middle class and the masses, and played it clean, won by a wide margin over the incumbent mayor and the vice-mayor. Akbayan topped the party-list vote in Los Baños, as it had in 1998. Erasga, however, lost.<sup>34</sup>

As mayor, Perez has remained an "action man."<sup>35</sup> He has provided loans for new businesses and established a public employment service for residents looking for jobs.<sup>36</sup> A columnist of a national newspaper praised Perez for "localizing good governance," crediting his administration for the upgrading of the quality of elementary and high school education, as well as of the health service; improved traffic flow; and better maintenance of peace and order through such measures as better street lighting, a campaign against drug traffickers and improved police visibility and capability. He also complimented Los Baños for having the cleanest roads and public markets in Laguna,<sup>37</sup> the result apparently of the municipal LGU's novel anti-littering drive involving

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<sup>32</sup> Castillo 2004, pp. 117-40.

<sup>33</sup> With its high income, the barangay LGU under Perez's leadership was able to acquire and maintain two firetrucks, two garbage trucks and an ambulance of its own. From time to time, it lent these resources to the municipal LGU, which did not have any of these.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Castillo.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Mayor Caesar P. Perez, 1 April 2002, Los Baños, Laguna.

<sup>37</sup> Adriano 2003, p. 4.



deputized “environmental enforcers.” Building on the success of this campaign, the municipal LGU, in coordination with other government agencies and with POs/NGOs, has drawn up a municipal waste management and waste segregation plan and an environment management system, including the clean-up of creeks and tributaries.<sup>38</sup> Through frequent visits to barangays and consultations with barangay leaders, e.g. “Ugnayan sa Barangay” (Linking with the Barangay”), Perez has kept in close touch with his constituency. In 2000, President Estrada proclaimed Los Baños, which is said to have the most Ph.D. holders per square kilometer in the country, a “science and nature city.” Perez has drawn up major programs to develop the municipality as such, e.g., the establishment of a “one-stop-shop science and technology center.”<sup>39</sup>

After Perez’s victory, Pilar continued to implement BDP-PRA and Akbayan, to build a political party base in the barangays. By November 2002, nine out of Los Baños’ 14 barangays had finished their five-year development plans, each consisting of a thick volume with illustrations and graphs. After BDP-PRA, Pilar conducted other trainings such as gender and development, and barangay enterprise development planning seminars. Perez sought the assistance of Pilar in drawing up a five-year municipal development plan that would still basically adhere to the 25-year development plant formulated with Prodem’s assistance but spell out clearer short-term targets.<sup>40</sup> Although a few Akbayan members who were also in Pilar were regularly in touch with Perez and some Akbayan-linked POs/NGOs participated actively in the municipality’s local special bodies, Akbayan-Los Baños itself still had not really gotten into the thick of municipal governance yet. In running the municipal LGU, Perez basically worked with his own team, without much assistance from Akbayan or PPC. With Akbayan and Batman NGOs scaling up from barangay to municipal governance in various parts of the country, Akbayan-Los Baños resolved to engage more fully in municipal politics as well as to undertake organizing in the academe, in church circles and among professionals.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Perez, Faylon, Pantua and Valdez 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Mayor Perez.

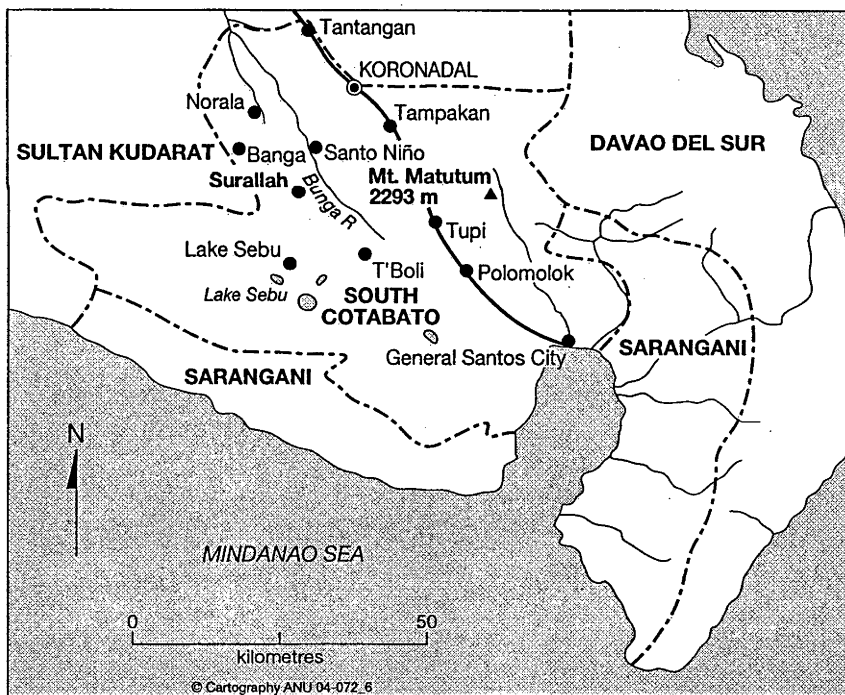
<sup>40</sup> Interview with Helene Aquino.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Castillo.

## *Assisting a Municipal LGU in Participatory Governance: Surallah, South Cotabato*

While Akbayan's engagement in local governance in Los Baños had proceeded from the barangay to the municipal level, it was the reverse in Surallah, South Cotabato.

In the Akbayan founding congress of January 1998, one of the delegates from South Cotabato was Romulo O. Solivio, of Surallah,<sup>42</sup> a fast developing agricultural town aspiring to be the province's agro-industrial center. A mechanical engineer and rice mill owner, Solivio had been involved in the ND movement during the Marcos period. After EDSA I, he turned to local politics. He was elected municipal councilor in 1988 and ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 1992 and 1995. Akbayan supported Solivio in his third mayoral bid in 1998. Running under NPC, he finally made it, together with his running mate and five of the eight candidates for councilor on his ticket.<sup>43</sup>



**Map of South Cotabato province, showing Surallah.**

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Sumog-oy.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Romulo O. Solivio, mayor, Surallah, South Cotabato, 19 October, 2002, in Surallah

In February 1999, Solivio learned about participatory barangay development planning through a SIAD conference sponsored by Kaisahan and several other Batman NGOs.<sup>44</sup> A few months later, the Surallah LGU launched the Barangay Integrated Area Development Program (BIADP), which aimed “to develop and strengthen the communities and institutions through a process which encourages local initiatives and active participation of the people in carrying out development activities.” Solivio’s “flagship program” sought to make Surallah’s 17 barangays “the centerpiece of development.” Among BIADP’s major features were BDP-PRA, resource mobilization for barangay development; and integrated delivery of services to the barangays.

Kaisahan and Building Alternative Rural Resource Institutions and Organizing Services (Barrios), a newly-established local NGO based in General Santos City, assisted the Surallah LGU in conducting BDP-PRA in all of the municipality’s 17 barangays in June-September 1999. The one-week planning process in each barangay involved barangay and purok officials and representatives of sectoral groups and ended with the five-year development plan being presented to a barangay general assembly for approval. Six months later, as a follow-up to BDP-PRA, Kaisahan and Barrios facilitated a visit of Surallah municipal and barangay officials to Toboso, Negros Occidental, and Alimodian, Iloilo, two early BDP-PRA areas, for on-site learning from the latter’s experiences in participatory local governance. Furthermore, to help the barangays raise funds for their development projects, the two NGOs, in coordination with municipal LGU staff, conducted a three-day training seminar on project proposal making.<sup>45</sup>

In April 2000, Surallah held an innovative resource mobilization activity called “Participatory Barangay Development and Local Governance Fair 2000.” Nina T. Iszatt described the event:

[E]ach barangay set up its own booth in the municipal plaza, creatively decorated to display its five-year development plan, mission-vision of the barangay, project proposals, visual aids such as the Resource Map, which had been made during the planning, and local produce. Potential funders including Congressional Representatives, Provincial and Regional national line agency officials and NGOs, wandered around inspecting the hard work of the barangay residents, meeting with them and pledging to finance their

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<sup>44</sup> Iszatt 2002, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Solivio, “2000-2001 Gawad Galing Pook Program Application,” January 2001.

projects. In a fiesta-style atmosphere, the barangay residents and officials had the opportunity to ‘talk to higher officials’ in order to market their project proposals. At the end of a tiring day a total of P67,370,500 worth of pledges was announced.<sup>46</sup>

Another Solivio novelty, “Barangayan 2000,” billed as “an integrated delivery of various services of the LGU to the barangays,” also had a festive air to it. Municipal officials and personnel from the different departments of the LGU trooped into a barangay to deliver services to the people – staying there for three days and two nights. An LGU official narrated:

Practically the entire LGU joined the barangay visit and practically the entire barangay came to meet us. We integrated with the people We explained to them what the municipal government was doing. We discussed with them. We gave free medical and dental services, free toilet bowls, free seedlings, free iodized salt, free branding of carabaos and horses, free birth registrations, even free weddings. There was food for everyone. Since not all of us could be accommodated in the people’s houses, some of us just slept on the stage of the plaza grandstand, on benches, tables, anywhere.<sup>47</sup>

On the basis of his performance, Solivio thought that his reelection in 2001 was assured. “Surveys showed that he would win,” remarked a municipal councilor. “He lowered his guard.”<sup>48</sup> Solivio’s opponent capitalized on the increase in stall rental fees at the newly reconstructed public market, which had incensed many local traders, and on alleged irregularities in LGU dealings with a certain contractor.<sup>49</sup> Regular LGU personnel, who had a “culture shock”<sup>50</sup> with the demands and hectic pace of Solivio’s participatory, grassroots-focused politics and who found Solivio “too strict,” campaigned against him. As in the

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<sup>46</sup> Iszatt 2002, p. 9. The P67 million in “pledges” is astounding if one considers that Surallah’s revenues in 1998 had totaled P42 million. Of the “pledges” made, however, only 20.44% (P14 million) had been realized as of October 2001. (Iszatt 2004, pp. 176-7.)

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Isidro Suedad, coordinator of the Technical Working Group, municipal government of Surallah, South Cotabato, 18 October 2002, in Lake Sebu, South Cotabato. It is not unusual to find many “unregistered” children in poor barangays, as their parents could not afford to pay birth registration fees.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Jorge J. Bautista, municipal councilor, Surallah, 21 October, 2002, in Surallah.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Solivio.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Rolando P. Agrazamendez, executive director, Allah Valley Development Foundation, Inc., 21 October 2002, in Surallah.

past, massive vote-buying and some intimidation of voters marred the elections. Solivio lost by just 589 votes (out of 23,000 votes cast). Although he came out ahead in twelve of the 15 rural barangays, he fared terribly in the vote-rich poblacion.<sup>51</sup>

All throughout Solivio's term as mayor of Surallah, Akbayan's engagement in both municipal and barangay governance was at best incidental. The Akbayan organization in Surallah itself was weak, loose and unconsolidated. Many of the NGO trainers and facilitators who assisted in BIADP were Akbayan members, but they themselves did not engage in Akbayan organizing in Surallah. They had presumed that Solivio and some former NDs working closely with him would take care of this. Unfortunately, however, the latter did not formally sign up with Akbayan.<sup>52</sup> Several left parties and groups competing in the party-list vote – Akbayan, AMIN, Sanlakas and in 2001, also Bayan Muna – had wooed Solivio's support. Fully aware that much of Surallah was part of CPP-NPA guerrilla territory and not wanting to be dragged into conflict between the "reaffirmists" vs. "rejectionists," Solivio and his associates opted to take a neutral stance.<sup>53</sup> During the 2001 electoral campaign, tensions between the ND and other left groups heated up. NPA guerrillas harassed Akbayan campaigners in various parts of Surallah. Bayan Muna members tried to increase their influence in Solivio's campaign machinery. Reacting to anti-Akbayan statements made by one of Solivio's associates, some Akbayan members freshly recruited by Akbayan organizers from Koronadal campaigned for Solivio's opponent.<sup>54</sup>

Apart from the serious weaknesses in party building, there were also shortcomings in community organizing. For all its creditable innovations in participatory governance, BIADP was still basically a top-down project. It lacked a crucial element: grassroots POs making their own initiatives and interacting with the municipal and barangay LGUs. Akbayan and the Batman NGOs involved in Surallah had apparently overlooked this. The municipal LGU could not possibly have been expected to take on the function of building POs.

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Pascual de la Cruz, municipal administrator, Surallah, 20 October 2002, in Surallah.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Sumog-oy.

<sup>53</sup> Interviews with Solivio and Suedad.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Sumog-oy; interview with Alma Cabal, secretary-general, Akbayan South Cotabato Division, 22 October 2002, in Marbel, South Cotabato.

*Engagement in Municipal Governance without BDP-PRA: Salcedo, Eastern Samar*

Unlike in Los Banos and Surallah, there was no BDP-PRA in the fifth-class municipality of Salcedo, Eastern Samar.<sup>55</sup> The local Akbayan organization and the Guiuan-based Pneuma could not find funding for undertaking it in Salcedo. Nonetheless, the lack of such a tool did not deter them from engagement in local governance, mainly at the municipal level.

In 1998, midwife and community organizer Mardonia Duran ran for municipal councilor under the ticket of Vice Mayor Melchor “Mega” Gagante<sup>56</sup> (Lakas-NUCD),<sup>57</sup> who challenged Mayor Alfredo Sumook<sup>58</sup> for Salcedo’s top post. Duran won comfortably, but Gagante lost by just 52 votes in elections tarnished by heavy vote-buying. Although five of the eight councilors-elect were on Gagante’s ticket, two defected to Sumook’s camp. The opposition councilors tried to push for development-oriented legislation but got nowhere. Sumook had no development plan<sup>59</sup> and, although Salcedo had so much unutilized land suitable for rice production, had no interest in agriculture at all. He assigned the municipal agriculturist to clean markets, and to plant trees and cut grass in the watershed area.<sup>60</sup> Duran, who had joined Akbayan during the electoral campaign, worked together with Pneuma personnel in organizing Akbayan chapters in Salcedo. Among those whom they managed to recruit was Joselito Abrugar, a three-term councilor who had been an activist in his student days.<sup>61</sup>

In the Sumook-Gagante rematch, Akbayan supported Gagante, who ran again under Lakas-NUCD. Carrying a platform of good governance and reform,<sup>62</sup> he had agreed to promote people’s participation in governance and to support

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<sup>55</sup> Salcedo, blighted by years of mismanagement and corruption, is a rural backwater.

<sup>56</sup> A semi-retired businessman, Gagante wanted to devote the rest of his active life to public service in his hometown. (Interview with Melchor Q. Gagante, mayor, Salcedo, Eastern Samar, 4 June 2002, in Salcedo.)

<sup>57</sup> Former President Fidel Ramos’ *Lakas ng Sambayanan* (Strength of the People) – National Union of Christian Democrats.

<sup>58</sup> The Dazo-Sumook clan had dominated local politics in Salcedo since the Marcos era. (See Macale 2001, p. 3.) Under more than twenty years of this dynastic rule, Salcedo ended up a rural backwater.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Joselito Abrugar, private secretary of the mayor (2001-4), and former municipal councilor (1992-2001), Salcedo, Eastern Samar, 5 June 2002, in Salcedo.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Donato Padullo, municipal agriculturist, Salcedo, Eastern Samar, 5 June 2002, in Salcedo.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Rodol Mercado, 12 November 2002.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Esteban Regis, Jr., municipal councilor, Salcedo, Eastern Samar, 5 June 2002, in Salcedo. One of the campaign slogans was: “MEGA – Moving towards Excellence in Good Administration!”

Akbayan in the party-list ballot.<sup>63</sup> In another vote-buying-marred election, Gagante won by 426 votes and Duran was reelected, but pro-Sumook councilors retained the majority in the municipal council. Abrugar agreed to become the mayor's private secretary.<sup>64</sup> After the elections, two Akbayan national officials conferred with five mayors-elect of Eastern Samar, including Gagante. Akbayan continued to organize party chapters in Salcedo; two of the new Akbayan recruits were Gagante himself and a young councilor, Esteban Regis, Jr., a former student activist like Abrugar.<sup>65</sup>

With the able help of Abrugar, Duran and Regis, among others, Mayor Gagante was able to achieve much in his first year. To increase food production, his administration set up demonstration farms in different barangays, acquired modern farm equipment (for hiring out to farmers), repaired long-neglected farm-to-market roads, strengthened livelihood cooperatives and developed links with agricultural institutions. Health services were improved through such measures as barangay clinics (one barangay per week) and the installation of potable water supply in key barangays. To upgrade education, the LGU opened another rural high school, subsidized volunteer teachers, built additional classrooms and ensured the granting of LGU scholarships on the basis of merit. For environmental protection, the Gagante administration intensified the rehabilitation of a watershed area and the crackdown on illegal fishing. For transparency and public accountability, the LGU put out a newsletter, *Abot-Kamay*, and the treasurer's and accountant's office published the monthly collections.<sup>66</sup>

Under Mayor Gagante, Salcedo came to have a more modest version of Surallah's "Barangayan." I had the chance join a "visitation" of Gagante and LGU personnel to the farthest barangay, Matarinao, in June 2002. We left early in the morning. The LGU staffers rode on the back of a truck; I rode with the mayor and the municipal health officer (a medical doctor) in an old four-wheel drive. Soon enough, I realized that an ordinary vehicle would not have made it – the road was in terrible shape. The barangay officials and residents welcomed us at the plaza. In a short program, Gagante explained the development thrusts and projects of his administration and heads of departments discussed the functions of their departments. During the open forum, the residents brought up various problems in their locality: lack of jobs, delayed electrification, illegal fishing, lack

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with Rodel Mercado.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Ilberto Macale, editor, *Abot-Kamay*, 13 November 2002, in Salcedo.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Rodel Mercado.

<sup>66</sup> Abrugar 2002, pp. 14-16.

of health facilities, poor communications, etc. At noon, we had a hearty – but not sumptuous – meal. Throughout the day, LGU personnel took care of various services and concerns – medical and dental check-ups and giving out of free medicines, issuance of residence certificates, collection of business and real property taxes, distribution of vegetable seeds, etc. We traveled back to the municipal hall in the late afternoon. I noticed that after attending to a stream of patients, the doctor was exhausted.

Inspired by the national Akbayan conference of LGU officials in December 2002, Akbayan LGU officials in southeastern Samar<sup>67</sup> held their own sub-provincial consultations, with those of Salcedo actively taking part. By October 2003, Akbayan had twelve barangay-based chapters in Salcedo. Akbayan-Salcedo had not yet made much progress in recruiting barangay officials, but it had made some allies among them. While continuing to explore possible funding sources for BDP-PRA, Pneuma facilitated the participation of Salcedo's municipal planning and development coordinator in BDP-PRA sessions in a nearby municipality. He came away impressed. As in Surallah, PO building remained weak in Salcedo, as neither Akbayan nor Pneuma had the resources to deploy a good community organizer.<sup>68</sup>

*Engagement in Inter-LGU Development Cooperation: Buldon, Barira and Matanog, Maguindanao*

The Local Government Code allows LGUs, through appropriate ordinances, to “group themselves, consolidate or coordinate their efforts, sources, and resources for purposes commonly beneficial to them.”<sup>69</sup> Without drawing attention to itself, Akbayan has been very much involved in the efforts of the LGUs in the former Camp Abubakar area – the Iranun municipalities of Buldon, Matanog and Barira – to coordinate their rehabilitation and development plans. Akbayan's involvement in the Iranun Development Council (IDC) marks its first engagement in inter-municipal LGU development cooperation.

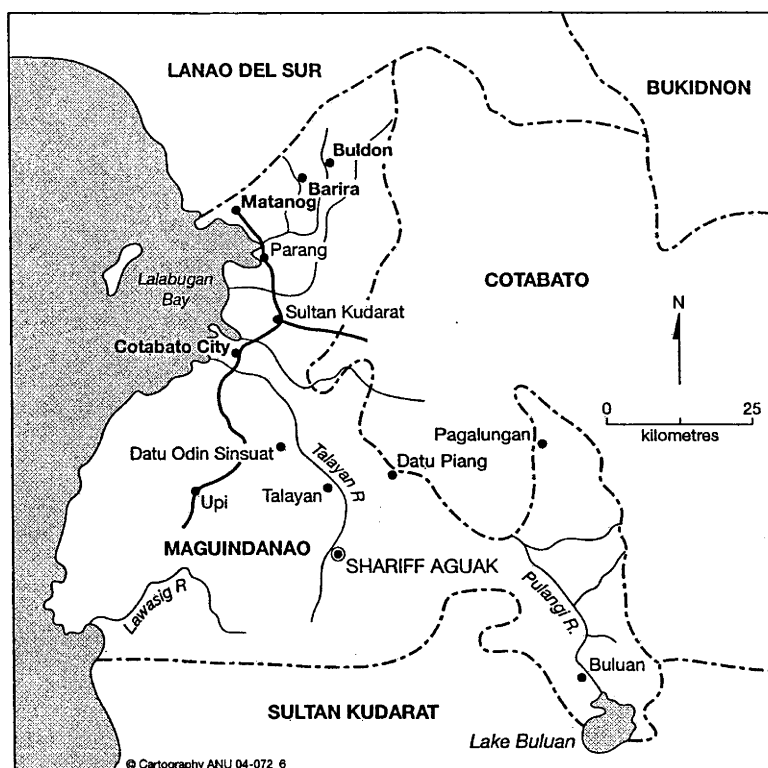
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<sup>67</sup> Ten LGU officials were Akbayan members, but they had all run under traditional parties in 2001.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Rodel Mercado, 29 October 2003, in Quezon City.

<sup>69</sup> Oversight Committee, Philippine Congress 1992, p. 39.





**Map of Maguindanao province, showing  
Cotabato City, Barira, Buldon and Matanog**

In the May 2001 elections, Akbayan endorsed the reelection bids of Abolais Manalao (Lakas-NUCD) and Nasser Imam (KAMPI),<sup>70</sup> the youthful and progressive mayors of Buldon and Matanog, who in turn supported Akbayan in the party-list vote. Both won. After the elections, Manalao, Imam and Barira's young, new mayor Alexander Tomawis (KAMPI) – all good friends – often went around together and exchanged notes on their LGU work. In the elections for the legislative assembly of the ARMM in November 2001, the three supported the candidacy of another young, reform-oriented Iranun, Ibrahim Ibay. Also active in Ibay's campaign was the Cotabato City-based lawyer Suharto Ambolodto, ISI executive director and Akbayan national vice-chairperson.<sup>71</sup> Shortly after Ibay's

<sup>70</sup> Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's *Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino* (Partner of the Free Filipino).

<sup>71</sup> Interviews with Ambolodto; Alexander D. Tomawis, mayor, Barira, Maguindanao, 23 July 2002, in Cotabato City; Suharto I. Ibay, vice-mayor, Matanog, Maguindanao, 23 July 2002, in Cotabato City; Cahar P. Ibay, provincial board member, Maguindanao, 23 July 2002, in Cotabato City; Abolais A. Manalao, mayor, Buldon, Maguindanao, and Camar A. Tago, former municipal action officer, Buldon, 30 November 2002, in Manila. The ISI is a research and advocacy NGO "dedicated to the formulation, assessment advocacy, administration and development of strategic peace and development interventions in Mindanao." (Institute for Strategic Initiatives and Institute of Politics and Governance 2002, p.3.)

electoral victory, the three mayors, Ambolodto, Assemblyman-elect Ibay and Maguindanao Provincial Board member Cahar Ibay held a series of meetings to discuss the coordination of their development initiatives. They agreed to set up the IDC as the main vehicle for inter-LGU cooperation, with the Akbayan-aligned ISI providing support services and performing as its secretariat.<sup>72</sup> Akbayan, through Ambolodto and the ISI personnel, who were Akbayan members, played an active role in IDC's strategic planning as well as day-to-day administration.

Coming from the former Camp Abubakar area, the Iranun LGU officials knew that they stood a good chance of mobilizing considerable support for their rehabilitation and development endeavors. Because of government neglect, corruption and the war, Buldon, Matanog and Barira had remained very backward – all three were sixth-class municipalities. Since the Marcos period, the LGUs of the three towns had frequently held office in Cotabato City or Parang, i.e., wherever the mayor actually lived or spent most of his time. The municipal halls in Buldon and Matanog had often been quiet and nearly empty, with goats peacefully grazing in the yard. On paper, the construction of the municipal building of Barira was supposed to have been finished a long time ago. “Whoever made the report must have taken the photo of another building,” quipped an Akbayan organizer.<sup>73</sup>

A week after its formation, the IDC managed to secure the support of President Arroyo and her Cabinet, who were then holding a meeting in Cotabato City. In the subsequent months, various forms of support from various government agencies did pour in – construction or repair of farm-to-market roads, access roads and bridges; new municipal buildings and facilities; day-care centers and more shelter units; agricultural implements and plant materials; medicines, etc. While the development assistance was already coming in, the IDC, in coordination with ISI, IPG and government agencies (particularly the Department of Agriculture, National Anti-Poverty Commission and the Department of Social Welfare and Development), continued to hold development planning meetings to identify needs, gaps and possible interventions.<sup>74</sup> In July 2002, President Arroyo herself visited the former Camp Abubakar area, declaring it as a “peace and development zone” and assuring the local officials that she would extend all her support to the IDC.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Institute for Strategic Initiatives 2002, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Macabangon.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Ambolodto.

<sup>75</sup> *The Manila Times* 2002, p. 1.

Upon the intercession of ISI, the IDC agreed to adopt SIAD as its development framework. In its plan, the IDC envisaged a rehabilitation and reconstruction phase of six to twelve months, followed by the SIAD proper (five years). The SIAD phase would involve the development of the 79,000-hectare area of Buldon, Matanog and Barira into a progressive agricultural center planted to corn, cash crops and fruit trees and engaged in integrated sustainable agricultural production. To prepare the LGUs for the SIAD phase, ISI, with funding from the Asia Foundation and USAID, has facilitated local governance capacity-building activities such as basic local governance and BDP-PRA trainings among municipal and barangay officials, religious leaders, peasants, women, youth and LGU personnel. IDC and ISI hope that the development plans of the 34 barangays in the area will eventually be integrated into the medium-term development plans of the three municipalities. To complement its engagement with the LGUs, ISI intends to engage in community organizing and thus help build self-sustaining rural organizations and cooperatives.<sup>76</sup>

In less than two years, IDC's performance seemed quite impressive. As of October 2003, according to Ambolodto, IDC had managed to attract rehabilitation and development assistance worth a total of P240 million since its inception. About sixty per cent of the barangays had completed the BDP-PRA process. Apart from getting government support, IDC had managed to secure the MILF's endorsement through the Bangsa Moro Development Agency, which the government and the MILF had jointly established. Nonetheless, Ambolodto sounded not all too content. "Much of the development assistance went into infrastructure. Thus far, the projects have not yet had much impact on poverty alleviation. Perhaps we should have had more of livelihood projects at the start."<sup>77</sup> Despite IDC's efforts to make the Iranun area a zone of peace and development, it still proved powerless in preventing armed hostilities between political clans in Matanog. In 2002, a series of ambushes and other violent incidents between the feuding Imam and Macapeges clans of Matanog resulted in several fatalities.<sup>78</sup>

Among the LGU officials of Buldon, Matanog and Barira, Akbayan earned much respect. The three mayors and several other local officials joined Akbayan, but were all expected to run under Arroyo's coalition in May 2004. With many of

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<sup>76</sup> Institute for Strategic Initiatives (ISI) and Institute of Politics and Governance (IPG) 2002, p. 52.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Ambolodto, 30 October 2003, in Makati.

local Akbayan leaders devoting much of their attention to the IDC, the organizing of Akbayan chapters at the barangay level suffered.<sup>79</sup>

### ***Electoral Engagement at the Municipal/City Level***

In its first electoral bid in 1998, Akbayan mainly focused on the party-list ballot, although it also fielded or endorsed some candidates in the local elections. Local activists and members of Akbayan were most eager to campaign and speak about the party's platform of "new politics" to voters, but they were hobbled by the Comelec's failure to conduct a good information campaign on the party-list system. "We ended up spending much more time, money and energy explaining what the party-list system was all about," complained one campaigner. The voters' lack of understanding of the party-list system, however, was a problem not just of Akbayan. All the parties and groups in the system were in the same bind. In raising funds and winning votes, local Akbayan campaigners relied on the networks of POs/NGOs aligned with, or supportive of, Akbayan; the communities serviced by various projects of these POs/NGOs; and allies within the church, civic groups and the business sector. In areas where Akbayan and allied NGOs had conducted trainings on participatory barangay governance, as in Los Baños and Daraga, Akbayan also managed to harness the support of some barangay and municipal officials.<sup>80</sup> Like other left parties and groups, Akbayan campaigners fretted about possible dirty tricks of *trapos* and their surrogate parties and groups. It turned out, however, that the threat the *trapos* posed in the party-list vote had been overestimated. *Trapos* interested in becoming congresspersons had apparently preferred to avail of the traditional route – elections by congressional district. In some areas, votes for Akbayan were not counted, but in many cases, this had less to do with *trapo* tricks, and more with confusion about, or exasperation with, the party-list system among public school teachers designated to do the counting.

In 2001, Akbayan aimed to get the maximum three congressional seats in the party-list vote; at the same time, it fielded or endorsed more candidates in the local elections. Akbayan tapped its usual networks of POs/NGOs and supporters. This time, however, Akbayan had many more allies among barangay

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<sup>78</sup> See *Mindanao Cross* 2002, p. 4; and Maitem 2002, p. 1. Nasser Imam defeated Kahar Macapeges in Matanog's mayoralty race in 1998 and 2001. The Macapeges clan had held power in Matanog ever since it was established as a separate municipality in 1975.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Ambolodto, 30 October 2003.

<sup>80</sup> Interviews with Castillo and Magayanes.

and municipal officials, thanks in good part to the Batman and the SIAD programs. Since Comelec still had not come up with a proper information drive on the party-list system, local Akbayan campaigners once again had to do this themselves. In almost all of the rural municipalities I visited during my fieldwork, Akbayan or Akbayan-endorsed candidates informed me that they had had to contend with the dirty tactics of their *trapo* opponents – vote-buying, “flying voters,” tampering of election returns, etc. NPA guerrillas harassed local Akbayan campaigners in several of the places I visited, e.g. Daraga, Surallah and Davao City (particularly Paquibato district), telling them to stop campaigning for Akbayan.<sup>81</sup> The guerrillas also ripped off Akbayan posters. Although local Akbayan campaigners tried to thwart or neutralize *trapo* dirty tactics and NPA harassment, they were not always successful.

Since 2001 was already the second foray of Akbayan into both the party-list ballot and local elections, it would have been logical to expect it to be much better prepared. But most of the places I visited had many signs of inadequate or last-minute preparations. First and foremost, I could hardly find written evidence of systematic investigations into local politics and power dynamics – profiles of major politicians, politico-economic clans and factions at the local and provincial levels; their political party and coalition affiliations; links to provincial and regional kingpins and national politicians, sources of funds, etc. Nor was there much evidence of thorough searches for prospective progressive candidates at the local level. Key local cadres or “operators” could rattle off a lot of information and analyses, but, since these were largely unwritten, much of them did not filter down to the mass activists and campaigners. According to an Akbayan leader, quite a number of party members are still very much used to the “oral tradition.”<sup>82</sup> Good studies of local politics and power dynamics would probably have helped Akbayan not just in mounting stronger challenges to *trapos* in local elections but also in identifying potential Akbayan supporters in the party-list vote and in exploring possible synergies between its party-list and its local election campaigns. For proper planning and preparation, the studies of local politics and power dynamics could have been done way before election time.

In several places I visited, I noted that in the months and weeks before the deadline for filing of candidacy, Akbayan did not take active part in, nor even attempt to influence, certain crucial decisions of local politician-allies or even of

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<sup>81</sup> Interviews with Magayanes, Cabal and Lampon.

local politicians who were already Akbayan members – whether to run or not; for which position; under which party, coalition or slate, or as independent; who should or should not be included in a slate; who to approach for financial support, etc. It seemed to have forgotten that it was a political party that could and should assert itself on such matters. Since Akbayan was vying with *trapo* parties for the primary allegiance of these politicians, it could very well have lost some of them by default.

Knowing that the Comelec had made such a mess of the information drive of on the party-list system in 1998, Akbayan could have encouraged civic-oriented groups, especially those that maintained a “non-partisan” stance, to help out in voters’ education before the election campaign period. And knowing that the CPP-NPA considers all non-ND left parties and groups as “counter-revolutionary,” Akbayan could have anticipated that with the entry of Bayan Muna into the electoral arena, the CPP-NPA would threaten and harass its activists and campaigners (among others). Hence, it could have prepared a forceful political response well in advance.

I found no evidence of long-term finance planning for the elections in any of the areas of study. Finance planning started a few months or weeks before the election campaign or during the campaign itself.

According to some Akbayan members I interviewed, one of the factors for the inadequacies or belatedness in the preparations for the 2001 elections was that, as in 1998, Akbayan held its national congress just a few weeks before the start of the election campaign. The January 2001 congress could indeed have been held much earlier. However, I attribute the inadequate or last-minute electoral preparations mainly to something else: a strong proclivity within the Philippine left towards short-span, short-preparation mass actions and campaigns. Left parties and groups can and do plan certain mass campaigns months or even over a year in advance. In response to urgent political or social developments, however, they often feel compelled to come up with mass protest or advocacy actions as promptly as possible. Many urban-based or urban-developed activists and members of left parties and groups have become so inured to the quick-reaction type of mass actions and campaigns that they have developed a tendency to treat all mass activity in the same manner: on the quick. Elections have become no exception. To many left activists, the election campaign has turned into just another “quickie” mass campaign. They forget that

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Congressman Mario Aguja, on 2 December 2003, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

although the actual election campaign does not really last very long (from one and a half to three months), it requires long preparation. The “quickie” mentality of left activists contrasts with the more premeditating outlook of many *trapos*, who see politics as their means to power and wealth, and who, right after one election, already start planning for the next. Pitted against such calculating opponents, progressive candidates who have prepared late risk getting thrashed.

Akbayan’s two congresspersons and over a hundred local officials indicate that notwithstanding the deficiencies in electoral preparations, it did manage, in a fair number of areas at least, to thwart or neutralize the *trapos*’ dirty tactics and NPA harassment and to achieve some modest victories. Drawing lessons from its electoral experience since 1997, Aksyon/Akbayan has designed and refined training modules on election campaign management, poll watching, etc., and come up with possibly more effective ways of preventing fraud, coercion and violence. To try to counter both *trapo* tricks and NPA harassment in the 2004 elections, for instance, Akbayan joined hands with a number of societal organizations as well as other political parties in launching a campaign for free, honest and peaceful polls called “Compact for Peaceful Elections,” and seeing to it that this would be a truly grassroots campaign, and not just a middle class and urban-centered one.<sup>83</sup> It will take much, much more than just a campaign, however, to fight vote-buying and the culture of influence-peddling, unequal favor-exchange, and dependence that *trapos* have propagated for decades.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps only sustained popular political education, in the nature of “dialogical encounters” with the masses, can uproot such pervasive harmful influences of patronage politics.

In many of the areas I visited, I noted some confusion as to whether Akbayan was actually fielding or merely endorsing certain local candidates. I discovered that this had something to do with the choice of party to run under. Akbayan had campaigned for three types of local candidates: 1) non-Akbayan members who ran under traditional parties or as independents; 2) Akbayan members who ran under traditional parties or as independents; and 3) Akbayan members who actually ran under Akbayan. Strictly speaking, only those in No. 3 could really be considered as Akbayan-fielded. Within Akbayan ranks, however, those in No. 2 tended to be seen as such too. In 1998, a good number of local

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<sup>83</sup> Email from Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel, member, National Executive Committee, Akbayan, 5 January 2004; Burgonio 2004, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> The gravity of the problem really hit me when I discovered during my fieldwork that some veteran politicians who were reputed to be “progressive” and were endorsed by new

candidates of types No. 1 and 2 had won. There were a few of No. 3, however, who made it, as in Culion, Palawan, for instance.<sup>85</sup> Prior to 2002, the distinction between fielding or merely endorsing local candidates did not seem to matter much, since Akbayan was still unfamiliar with municipal governance, and could not provide much political direction or guidance to winning candidates, whether fielded or endorsed.

Akbayan leaders did not have qualms about Akbayan members running under traditional parties. They believed that the party, in the process of building itself up to mount a strong challenge to the *trapos*, would have to go through a phase where some members, in effect, would have double party membership – Akbayan and *trapo*! However, when and how the practice of double-party allegiance would end was not clear.

*Running under a Traditional Party: Governor Generoso, Davao Oriental, and Jagna, Bohol*

In 2001, fresh Akbayan recruits Dela Cerna and Eksam Lloren (see pp. 226-7) ran for mayor in their respective towns, Governor Generoso, Davao Oriental, and Jagna, Bohol, going up against powerful opponents. Dela Cerna ran against Perfecto Orenicia, the elder brother of the incumbent mayor, Vicente Orenicia (PMP),<sup>86</sup> who, after three terms, could no longer run for reelection. V. Orenicia had defeated Dela Cerna in a closely fought contest in 1998 that, Dela Cerna's supporters claimed, had been marred by vote-buying, harassment and cheating. (The Comelec eventually excluded election returns from two barangays because of irregularities.) V. Orenicia's stint as mayor had been tainted by several unsolved, apparently political killings, including those of a municipal councilor and a municipal planning and development officer who had questioned certain financial irregularities in the local bureaucracy, and a barangay captain who had opposed illegal logging operations. P. Orenicia had the backing of the great majority of the municipal councilors and the barangay captains in Governor Generoso.<sup>87</sup> Lloren faced the incumbent mayor, Marciana Ocmeja Tsurumi

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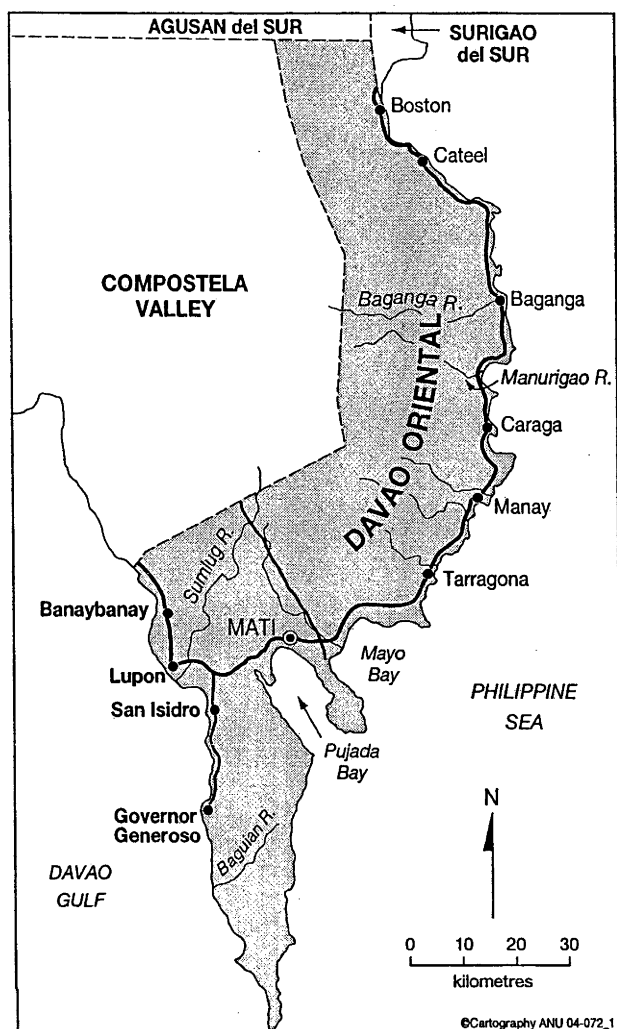
left parties (including Akbayan), had themselves resorted to vote-buying after being unable to find ways of countering their opponents' vote-buying.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Rocamora. It was difficult to get exact figures about Akbayan's local candidates in the 1998 and 2001 elections. I discovered that collated reports at the national office contained too many inaccuracies. Moreover, prior to 2003, Akbayan had not made a clear distinction among the three types of local candidates. They sometimes tended to be all lumped together as "Akbayan candidates."

<sup>86</sup> Estrada's *Partido ng Masang Pilipino*.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Dela Cerna.





**Map of Davao Oriental province, showing  
Banaybanay, Governor Generoso and San Isidro**

(PDP-Laban), who was running for a third term and had most of the municipal councilors and the barangay captains on her side. Tsurumi had trounced Eksam's brother, Senen, in the 1995 mayoral contest, and her candidate for the *Liga ng mga Barangay* presidency had defeated Eksam by a single vote in 1997. Eksam was one of the "Concerned Citizens of Jagna" who filed a complaint against Tsurumi to the Ombudsman in 1996 on alleged irregularities in the delivery of construction materials for some local projects.<sup>88</sup>

Akbayan did not play much of a role in the decisions of Dela Cerna and Lloren on running for mayor or on the choice of party (to run under). Dela Cerna had already intended to make another bid for the mayorship even before joining Akbayan. With Akbayan in Bohol still very weak, Lloren had made the decision

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Lloren.

largely on his own.<sup>89</sup> Both Dela Cerna and Lloren opted for the party of President Arroyo, Lakas-NUCD, and the ruling coalition, PPC. While both fully endorsed Akbayan in the party-list ballot, neither really entertained the idea of running under Akbayan itself. Up against powerful opponents, both felt that they needed the backing of an established party.<sup>90</sup> Lakas-NUCD had its appeal as a party identified with the administration and with EDSA II. But probably the deciding factor for Dela Cerna and Lloren was that their opponents did *not* go with Lakas-NUCD and chose parties of the opposition instead. Lakas-NUCD, which was looking for candidates with good chances of winning against P. Orencia and Tsurumi, picked them.<sup>91</sup> Dela Cerna and Lloren consulted local Akbayan members, all fresh Akbayan recruits too, in forming the slate of candidates for the local elections. Higher organs of Akbayan had no hand in this – indicating again that the party was still grappling with what it should be doing vis-à-vis local elections.

With vigorous engagement during the election campaign period, Akbayan managed to make up for its earlier shortcomings. Akbayan was at the very core of the campaigns of Dela Cerna and Lloren and their respective municipal tickets. The Dela Cerna and Lloren tickets actually relied on two campaign machineries or networks: that revolving around the traditional party and that around Akbayan. Since Dela Cerna, Lloren and many of their colleagues had run before, they already had traditional party networks. Lloren also benefited from the support of a former mayor who had lost to Tsurumi in a comeback bid in 1998. In Governor Generoso, the Akbayan network was virtually synonymous to *Barog Katawhan*, a multisectoral PO that Bisig members had helped organize in December 2000, a few months before the start of the election campaign. Since August 2000, PADC had been giving political education seminars in different barangays. *Barog* recruited many of those who had attended. When the election campaign started, *Barog* went all out for Dela Cerna and Akbayan. Its members

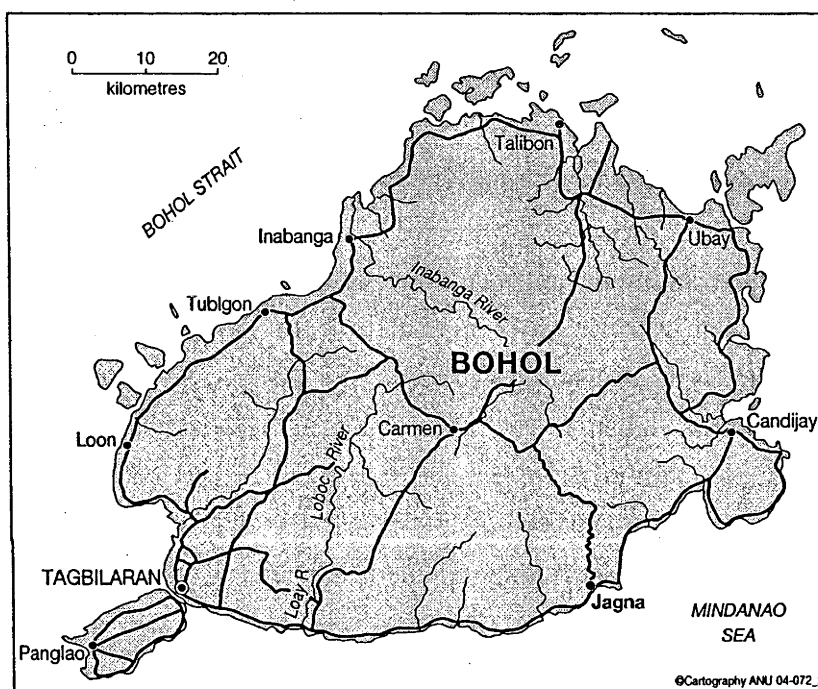
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<sup>89</sup> Interview with Teope.

<sup>90</sup> Interviews with Dela Cerna and Lloren. Lakas-NUCD did deliver to Dela Cerna and Lloren the promised financial support, especially the crucial “mobilization fund” for the homestretch of the campaign.

<sup>91</sup> The Orencias and Dela Cerna switched parties. In 1998, V. Orencia had run under Lakas-NUCD, Dela Cerna, under LAMMP-PMP. After the elections, V. Orencia joined LAMMP-PMP, then the administration party, under Estrada. Local politics in Governor Generoso clearly shows that traditional political parties are organizations of convenience, whose members come and go whenever it suits them. Since Akbayan regarded traditional parties as essentially the same, the choice of party to run under was a secondary concern. Whichever party could best help Dela Cerna and his municipal slate to win – that was it.

joined Akbayan.<sup>92</sup> In Jagna, the Akbayan organization consisted mainly of those who had come from the Batman seminars. Since CPGD had run out of funding, it had not been able to do follow-up work, e.g., PO organizing, in Jagna. To assist Lloren and Akbayan in Jagna, the Manila-based IPG deployed a senior cadre, who immediately arranged for an electoral campaign management training for Lloren's campaigners and took charge of strategic planning.<sup>93</sup> Towards the latter part of the campaign, Akbayan arranged for poll-watching seminars for Dela Cerna's and Akbayan's campaigners.



Map of Bohol, showing Jagna.

Both Dela Cerna and Lloren strove to conduct platform-based campaigns, emphasizing the need for good governance, transparency and “new politics.” They decried the retarded development of their respective towns<sup>94</sup> and put the blame for this squarely on the incumbents’ lack of clear development plans and on rampant graft and corruption. “Lloren represented a new system of politics,” says retired judge Bernardo Salas. “One of idealism, decency, a commitment to do something good, an aspiration for the town to develop ... a rejection of

<sup>92</sup> Interviews with Mayormita and Ibañez; interview with Leonila Acaylar-Pabatao, community organizer, PADC, 14 October 2002, in Banaybanay.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Teope.

<sup>94</sup> Lloren harped that in terms of economic development in Bohol province, Jagna used to be second only to Tagbilaran, but had now been surpassed by several other municipalities.

patronage.”<sup>95</sup> The development programs that Dela Cerna and Lloren outlined put the stress on poverty alleviation, on improving the livelihoods of the masses – the peasants, fisherfolk and, in Governor Generoso, also the *lumad* (indigenous people). For the protection of small fisherfolk as well as the environment, for instance, Dela Cerna vowed to fully implement the law banning commercial fishing in municipal waters, thus earning the ire of local fishing magnates who had been flagrantly violating the law. As advocates of participatory governance and popular empowerment, Dela Cerna and Lloren pushed for greater participation of POs/NGOs in local special bodies of the LGU like the local development councils, and more cooperative ventures between the LGUs and POs/NGOs. Dela Cerna, Lloren and several others in their tickets actively campaigned for Akbayan and explained its platform to voters, but they respected ticket-mates who supported, and campaigned for, other party-list groups.

The campaigns of Dela Cerna and Lloren had the usual evening rallies, house-to-house visits, leafleteering, campaign “jingles,” etc. In Governor Generoso, Barog/Akbayan, with chapters in all 20 barangays, campaigned aggressively. When word got around that certain logging interests were reportedly offering financial support to some councilors if the municipal council approved an application for an “Integrated Forest Management Agreement” that would have circumvented the logging ban, Barog/Akbayan staged a rally in front the municipal hall and threatened to campaign against those voting in favor. The application was rejected.<sup>96</sup> In Jagna, Lloren’s campaigners came up with imaginative, high-impact forms, e.g., caravans of jeepneys, motorcab and motorcycles that traversed the municipality from end to end, and a multi-media *miting de avance* with simultaneous big-screen showing. They also conducted several straw votes in the course of the campaign. What turned out to be the single biggest issue was Tsurumi’s plan to put up a new public market (to replace the old one which burnt down) in a less convenient site, a decision made without much public consultation.<sup>97</sup>

Dela Cerna’s and Lloren’s opponents used the “red scare” to frighten voters. Lloren managed to turn the “rebel” label into something positive by arguing that many of the Philippines’ heroes had once been branded rebels. With

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with Bernardo Salas, retired Court of First Instance judge, 16 May 2002, in Jagna, Bohol.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Absalon G. Montesclaros, former chairperson, Barog Katawhan, 5 July 2002, in Governor Generoso.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Ernesto C. Villanueva, executive assistant for program operations and economic enterprise, Jagna, Bohol, 16-17 May 2002, in Jagna; interview with Ma. Louella M. Tan – executive assistant for administration, Jagna, Bohol, 16 May 2002, in Jagna.

the help of Lakas-NUCD provincial leaders and Akbayan national officials, he managed to foil a plan unearthed by his supporters to have him arrested for supposed links with the CPP-NPA. Tsurumi invited a well-known anti-communist crusader from Cebu to speak at her *miting de avance*. In Governor Generoso, the red-baiting versus ex-priest Dela Cerna was more indirect – it was Akbayan that was branded “communist.”<sup>98</sup>

On election eve and on election day, Dela Cerna’s and Lloren’s supporters closely monitored goings-on in their areas. They watched out for possible election irregularities before and during the voting and during the counting. Because of the vote-buying, both Governor Generoso and Jagna were awash with money. “It was more than Christmas,” remarked the owner of a small pharmacy-store in Jagna. “We ran out of powder, lotion, sanitary napkins, ice-cream. Some of the peso bills still had stickers on them.”<sup>99</sup> In Governor Generoso, there were numerous reports of harassment or coercion during the voting and of attempts at fraud, particularly ballot-switching, during the counting.<sup>100</sup>

With 13,000 Jagna residents actually casting their ballots, Lloren won by a comfortable margin of almost 2000 votes (7,423 versus 5,532). His running mate and five candidates for councilor in his slate emerged victorious too.<sup>101</sup> In Governor Generoso, Dela Cerna also made it, but just barely. On the basis of precinct-based counting, he had won by over 900 votes. At the municipal hall, however, the figures that came in did not tally with the precinct count. Nonetheless, in the end, he still came out ahead by a slim margin – 725 votes (7,817 versus 7,092).<sup>102</sup> Fearing that the election could yet be stolen, Dela Cerna’s supporters adamantly demanded that the local Comelec official immediately proclaim him as the winner. They refused to leave the hall. Finally, at 2 a.m. the next day, Dela Cerna was proclaimed. Only four others in his ticket (the vice-mayor and three councilors) won.<sup>103</sup> In both Governor Generoso and Jagna, Akbayan topped the party-list vote, garnering over 2000 votes in each.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Interviews with Lloren and Dela Cerna.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Beverly Du-Abadingo, president, Jagna Market Vendors Association, 17 May 2002, in Jagna.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Andres L. Zaragosa, chairperson, Municipal Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Council, Governor Generoso, 3 July 2002, in Governor Generoso.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Tan.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Oscar Lugatiman, aide, Commission on Elections, Governor Generoso, 5 July 2002, in Governor Generoso.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Zaragosa.

<sup>104</sup> Interviews with Dela Cerna and Tan.

## *Running under Akbayan: Victoria, Laguna*

Victoria, Laguna, was one of the few municipalities in the entire country where Akbayan fielded – not just endorsed – candidates for local government posts in the 2001 elections. The fielding of Akbayan candidates in Victoria largely resulted from a local initiative and did not really proceed from some well laid-out plan coming from upper levels of the party organization.

When community organizers of Caret sought accreditation for their NGO with the local authorities in Victoria in 1999, they sought the help of Restituto Cacha, then a municipal councilor. A physician by profession, Cacha was well-known in the municipality for extending free medical service to indigent residents. Cacha managed to convince the municipal council, some of whom were wary of “leftist” groups, that Caret was a development NGO and not a communist front organization. Through the Caret organizers, who were also Akbayan members, Cacha got to know about Akbayan. Invited to an Akbayan political education seminar in Antipolo, Rizal, Cacha learned more about the party and its programs for “people’s participation in governance.” Convinced about Akbayan’s participatory approach, he joined the party and assisted Caret’s PO organizing efforts. He also helped to organize a province-wide Akbayan “basic orientation seminar” in Victoria, drawing some local leaders who had supported him in previous elections. Afterwards, they too joined Akbayan.<sup>105</sup>

For some time already, Cacha, a three-term councilor, had contemplated making a bid for the vice-mayorship. When he did decide to go for it, he did not feel that he needed the backing of an established party. In his first and third electoral attempts, Cacha had run under traditional parties – *Kilusan ng Bagong Lipunan* (KBL or New Society Movement) and LAMMP, respectively. In his second attempt, however, he had run as an independent – and still won. Why shouldn’t a party of “new politics” be able to make it?<sup>106</sup> Akbayan provincial leaders agreed to his proposal of a local Akbayan ticket with himself as candidate for vice-mayor, eight of his allies (mostly political greenhorns) for councilor and no candidate for mayor. Since the Caret/Akbayan organizers did not know local politicians well enough, they largely left it to Cacha to pick the Akbayan slate.<sup>107</sup> In the rush to beat the deadline for filing candidacy, he was not able to conduct

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<sup>105</sup> Interview with Soriano; interview with Restituto Cacha, vice-mayor, Victoria, Laguna, 5 February 2002, in Victoria.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Cacha.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Soriano.

more extensive discussions or consultations with the Akbayan-PO/NGO network.<sup>108</sup>

Three parties contested the Victoria local elections: PPC, LAMMP and Akbayan. The PPC fielded a complete slate; LAMMP, a slate without a vice-mayorality candidate. The contest for vice-mayor still turned out to be a three-cornered fight, as the PPC, unable to decisively settle who would be its official candidate, had two candidates for the post.<sup>109</sup> The Akbayan slate carried a platform of participatory governance and transparency in public office. Apart from Akbayan chapters in the different barangays of Victoria, Ugnayan and its affiliate organizations campaigned for the local Akbayan slate and for Akbayan in the party-list vote. Cacha and company raised funds mainly from local sources. The Akbayan national secretariat helped primarily in terms of posters and leaflets and in trainings on campaign management and poll-watching.<sup>110</sup> Since the formation of the Akbayan slate had not gone through extensive consultations, support within the Akbayan-PO/NGO network for individual candidates in the slate varied greatly.<sup>111</sup> “We really lacked resources,” said Akbayan organizer Nick Soriano. “We had to go all the way to the Akbayan headquarters in Quezon City to print our leaflets and small posters with the Risograph machine. Black and white, no pictures. We couldn’t afford mobile loudspeakers ... or [hiring] vehicles, for that matter. Doc [Cacha] didn’t even have a car of his own.”

Despite heavy vote-buying by their opponents, Cacha scraped through with a winning margin of just 300 votes (out of 12,000 votes cast) and two Akbayan candidates for councilor also made it. In Cacha’s analysis, the split in the PPC camp in the vice-mayoral contest contributed to his victory. Because of its feisty anti-Estrada stance during the time of EDSA II and III, Akbayan lost the party-list votes of local Estrada supporters, who comprised a sizeable section – possibly even a majority – of Victoria’s population. Nonetheless, as in Governor Generoso and Jagna, Akbayan came out No. 1 in the party-list ballot in Victoria, garnering 2000 votes.

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<sup>108</sup> Focus group discussion with nine leaders of Ugnayan-Victoria, 6 February 2002, in Victoria.

<sup>109</sup> All three vice-mayoral candidates, curiously enough, had previously been with LAMMP.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Cacha.

<sup>111</sup> Focus group discussion with Ugnayan-Victoria leaders.

On the way from Sulat, Eastern Samar, to Tacloban, Leyte, in June 2002, I hitched a ride with Mayor Javier Zacate, who was with his driver and two bodyguards. When I boarded the mayor's land cruiser, I was somewhat taken aback upon seeing several high-powered rifles lying around in the vehicle. It took me a while to get used to finding a "new politics" politician traveling around with so many guns. But having stayed at Zacate's residence and interviewed him and several others, I knew and understood why he was well-armed.

First involved in the ND movement as a student activist in the early 1980s, Zacate later engaged in urban poor, trade union and peasant organizing and in mass campaign management and was briefly with the NPA. When the ND movement split in 1992-3, Zacate did not join the "reaffirmists" nor the "rejectionists," but he maintained close ties with the latter. Having gained some experience in electoral campaign work in Mindoro in 1992, he served as the campaign manager of a congressional candidate in Eastern Samar in 1995. He weighed the possibility of running for public office himself.<sup>112</sup>

In 1998, Zacate made his first bid for the mayorship of his hometown, Sulat, a fifth-class municipality that had experienced hardly any growth for years. He faced a formidable opponent, the incumbent, Thelma Baldado, whose husband had been Sulat mayor in the Marcos period, and whose other relatives were "all over the place," i.e. the local government bureaucracy.<sup>113</sup> (The local government was practically the only major source of employment in the municipality.<sup>114</sup>) Zacate headed the local slate of NPC, which had earlier been looking for a plausible candidate to face Baldado (Lakas). He did not endorse any party or group in the party-list ballot, but both Sanlakas and Akbayan supported his candidacy.<sup>115</sup> Having closely studied the dirty tricks resorted to by *trapos* in the 1992 and 1995 elections, Zacate felt confident that he would be able to sufficiently thwart attempts to use such tricks against him.

During the campaign, Zacate criticized Baldado's lackluster performance and various anomalies under her administration, and put forward a program for

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<sup>112</sup> Interview with Javier Zacate, mayor, Sulat, Eastern Samar, 16 June 2002, in Sulat.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Ma. Nelia S. Columbretis, private secretary, office of the mayor, Sulat, Eastern Samar, 15 June 2002, in Sulat.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Ma. Milagros Ojeda, former community organizer, Sustainable Local Alternative Technologies, Inc. (SULAT), 15 July 2002, in Sulat.

<sup>115</sup> Since Akbayan did not have a chapter in Sulat, it extended its support mainly through Akbayan members in the Tacloban City-based Institute for Democratic Participation in Governance (IDPG) and the IDPG network in Leyte-Samar. They helped raise funds and produce campaign materials for Zacate's election campaign.



agricultural, fisheries and eco-tourism development anchored on “people empowerment.”<sup>116</sup> Baldado countered by raising the communist bogey, charging that Zacate was an NPA commander. On election eve (“ora de peligro”), there was extensive vote-buying, with certain barangay officials reportedly disbursing the money themselves. On election day itself, 600 official ballots were missing – Zacate’s camp feared that the missing ballots would be used for *lanzadera*.<sup>117</sup> It was during the counting, however, that much of the fraud took place: ballot-switching, misreadings of ballots, doctoring of election returns, etc. In several precincts, there were more ballots than actual voters and there were some ballot without the official seal. Zacate’s campaigners believed that some teachers and certain Comelec officials were directly involved in the cheating. Baldado won by over 200 votes.<sup>118</sup>

Zacate filed a protest. He hired handwriting experts from Manila. There was abundant evidence of fraud: same handwriting in a series of ballots; fine penmanship on many ballots from areas where most residents had poor penmanship; the use of ballpens different from those officially issued. In September, 1999, Zacate received unofficial word that Comelec had finished recounting and that he had won the elections by just one vote. In the midst of the Zacate camp’s celebration, just a few hundred meters from his house, some of Baldado’s followers stabbed one of his key campaigners to death. Zacate was inducted as mayor the next month.

Baldado appealed, as well as filed a petition for writ of *certiorari*,<sup>119</sup> questioning the execution order of the Regional Trial Court. She lost her appeal; Zacate’s winning margin increased to 138 votes. But she won the *certiorari* and

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<sup>116</sup> Zacate 2001, pp. 1-3. Among the specific features of Zacate’s platform were: farming system development, capital and marketing support to farmers; crops diversification; sustainable fishing; enforcement of fishery laws; fisheries conservation; efficient fishery production, utilization and marketing; tourism development; and environmental protection. Zacate advocated for popular participation in governance, asserting that “only the members of civil society themselves – households, organized sectors and institutions outside the state – can best articulate and work for their economic, social, political, cultural and spiritual aspirations.” (p. 1.)

<sup>117</sup> *Lanzadera* is one of the ways for “vote-buyers” to make sure that money paid is translated into votes. Marvin P. Bionat describes the *lanzadera* or *cadena* system as follows: “[The party handler gives] the first mercenary voter an already completed ballot, which he/she submits as his/her own. He/she then takes with him/her the blank ballot he/she was supposed to use. The party handler takes and completes the blank ballot and gives it to the next mercenary voter who is expected to come out with another blank ballot.” (Bionat 1998, pp. 105-6.)

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Columbrete; interview with Manuel V. Eroda, barangay captain, Riverside, Sulat, 14 June 2002, in Sulat; interview with Lina P. Palines, barangay captain, Loyola Heights, Sulat, 15 June 2002, in Sulat.

<sup>119</sup> In a petition for writ of *certiorari*, a losing party asks a higher court to review the decision of a lower court on the grounds that he/she has not received justice in the latter.

was reinstated as mayor in November 2000. Instead of pursuing the legal case, Zacate decided to concentrate his efforts on a rematch – the 2001 elections – only half a year away. Way before the elections, the Zacate camp prepared itself by holding several seminars (lasting several days) on poll watching, reviewing all the dirty tricks used against them in the 1998 elections and brainstorming ways and means of countering them.

In March 2001, just before the start of the electoral campaign, Zacate, his brother and a cousin were arrested in Quezon City for alleged involvement in the kidnapping-for-ransom of a Chinese businessman in Antipolo. The arrest was all over the national media. The three were brought to a safehouse and tortured. Through the intercession of some national politicians, however, they were set free a few days later. The charges were dropped. “It was a set-up,” Zacate remarked. “I had received warnings several days before that I would be arrested, but I did not know for what. A few hours before our arrest, a lot of people in Sulat were already being told to watch the evening news broadcast.”<sup>120</sup> In Zacate’s analysis, the attempt to implicate him in a kidnapping-for-ransom case was very much related to a scheme to link him with the NPA, which is known to have engaged in kidnapping-for-ransom in the past.

At the start of the campaign, T-shirts appeared all over Sulat with the slogan “No to KFR [kidnapping-for-ransom]!” Zacate’s camp immediately came up with its own T-shirt – one with a cat and the slogan: “*Sawa na ang pusa sa paksiw!*” (The cat is fed up with *paksiw*, a dish of recooked, leftover meat.) The “No to KFR!” ploy backfired. Zacate’s arrest and torture had drawn sympathy for him, and his T-shirt clicked. A catchy campaign “jingle” with the slogan “Javier ato!” (Javier fight!) caught on. Before Zacate’s *miting de avance*, his supporters came up with a show of force – a big torch parade that passed through the town’s main streets.<sup>121</sup>

On election day, Zacate’s supporters were much better prepared and much more vigilant, thanks to the poll-watching seminars. An alert Comelec registrar discovered two identical sets of official ballots; he immediately had one set burned in front of the town plaza. On the whole, Zacate’s camp managed to frustrate other attempts at cheating, except vote-buying. During the counting, Zacate received word of the presence of 16 unidentified armed men in a certain area. He immediately alerted the Philippine Army. In the light of the killing of one of his supporters the year before, Zacate had had the foresight of requesting

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<sup>120</sup> Interviews with Zacate.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Columbretis.

for the deployment of a truckload of Philippine Army soldiers to keep the peace. The unidentified armed men quietly withdrew.

The elections still turned out to be a close contest, this time with Zacate as the victor. The winning margin at the end of the election day count was more or less the same as before – over 200 votes. Unlike before, the result went unchallenged.

### *Up against 'Guns, Guerrillas and Gold': Daraga, Albay*

With the support of the multisectoral people's organization Biglead and allied organizations, Akbayan topped the party-list ballot in Daraga in 1998. For the 2001 elections, Akbayan-Daraga went a step further. Apart from campaigning once again for Akbayan in the party-list vote, it endorsed the candidacy of Marlene Magayanes for municipal councilor. Magayanes, an urban poor organizer and a leading figure of both Biglead and the local Akbayan, ran under the local Lakas-NUCD ticket headed by the then incumbent mayor, Wilson Andes. With her NGO background, Magayanes stressed participatory governance and development in her platform. Before the electoral campaign, Magayanes and Akbayan-Daraga prepared themselves for contending with the *trapos* "guns, goons and gold." In the actual campaign, however, their main tormentors turned out to be a different force: the NPA.

On the very first day of the campaign, four armed men, who identified themselves as NPA guerrillas, stopped Magayanes and some of her co-candidates from proceeding with their campaign rally in Barangay San Vicente Pequeño. "Pay up your 'permit-to-campaign' fee," one of the armed men demanded. The "fee" he stipulated ranged from P250,000 and two cellphones for the mayor to P10,000 for candidates for councilor. The guerrillas hit out at Akbayan, denouncing it as "pseudo-left" and its then president, Joel Rocamora, a former ND, as "a traitor to the movement." They then told everyone to go home. Magayanes' teammates did, but she continued campaigning.

A week later, a bigger NPA group, with high-powered rifles, chanced upon Magayanes and company campaigning in Barangay Bigao. Four of the armed men approached Magayanes' group and told them to disperse, saying that something untoward could happen if they did not. Once again, the NPAs let loose a tirade against Akbayan and Rocamora. They told Magayanes, "If you want to continue campaigning, you should resign from Akbayan." Magayanes and her assistant argued with them. One of the men pointed a gun at Magayanes. The

guerrillas also threatened to handcuff the two women and bring them to the NPA camp. The barangay residents and Magayanes' fellow candidates became fearful for her. The crowd broke up.<sup>122</sup>

At a campaign rally in Barangay Anislag, the NPAs, who were in the vicinity, did not present themselves anymore. However, they summoned one of the candidates and told him that Magayanes should not be allowed to speak. She still addressed the rally, but her fellow candidates were all nerves. After Anislag, Magayanes, yielding to the pleas of her ticket-mates, did not join campaign sorties to the southern barangays, reputed to be NPA areas, anymore.<sup>123</sup>

NPA guerrillas harassed Akbayan campaigners in different barangays of Daraga, even threatening some of them. They forbade the putting up of Akbayan posters and banners and they ripped off or tore down those that were put up. Once they stopped a jeep, confiscated Akbayan campaign leaflets that were on it and burned them. Fearing for their safety, Akbayan supporters stopped campaigning openly in or near NPA zones or avoided these altogether.<sup>124</sup> Those who still dared to go into these areas sometimes had to tone down their campaigning. A group of campaigners once toured several municipalities of Albay in a hired jeep; they kept playing the Akbayan "jingle." When the jeep entered a certain part of the town of Manito, however, the driver switched off the loudspeaker despite their objections.

One of those whom the NPA particularly harassed was Adelia Macinas, a barangay councilor of Inarado. Once, Macinas was called to a meeting in the house of another councilor, which was in a remote area. There, two armed NPA guerrillas gave the familiar harangue against Akbayan, Rocamora and Magayanes and demanded that she resign from Akbayan. When she continued campaigning for Akbayan after the meeting, unidentified men shadowed her and her family. Right in front of Macinas and other Akbayan members, the unidentified men removed, defaced or burned Akbayan posters that the former had posted in public places. Macinas remained uncowed. "Even if they had chopped me into bits, I would have continued," she recounted. Her defiant stance did not sit well with other barangay council members, who did not want trouble with the NPA,

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with Magayanes, 30 March 2002; interview with Maritess B. Llona, training and organizing officer, Center for Advocacy and Participatory Governance (CAPG), 31 October 2002, in Daraga.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Magayanes, 30 March 2002.

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Magayanes and Jay A. Carizo, research and advocacy officer, CAPG, 23 March 2002, in Quezon City.

and her own husband, who feared for her. (In the 2002 barangay elections, the NPA campaigned heavily against Macinas and she lost her reelection bid.)<sup>125</sup>

While openly campaigning against Magayanes and Akbayan, the guerrillas made no bones about their being for Bayan Muna and for certain local candidates identified with the NDs. Succumbing to NPA pressure, many of the local candidates, including Magayanes' ticket-mates, paid the "PTC fee" and put Bayan Muna on the party-list slot in their sample ballots. Many of those who had earlier agreed to put Akbayan shifted to Bayan Muna.<sup>126</sup>

Magayanes still landed No. 3 among the eight winning candidates for councilor. Bayan Muna came out first in the party-list vote in Daraga; Akbayan was a poor second.

### ***Building the Municipal/City Party Organization***

A strong party organization is crucial for Akbayan to be able to pursue all its engagements in a wide variety of spheres – contentious politics, development work, elections, governance, popular political education, etc. At the local level, party units are organized as follows: chapter (with a minimum of twelve members) at the barangay level; section (at least six chapters) at the municipal/city level; division (at least three sections) at the provincial, highly-urbanized city or legislative district level.<sup>127</sup> Building the party organization, however, has not gone smoothly. To attend to its myriad tasks, Akbayan has only a few full-time personnel. Most Akbayan members have their own jobs or sources of income to attend to. And whether full-time, part-time or spare-time, Akbayan activists have their personal lives to live too. Party members have found it difficult to combine party-building with Akbayan's other engagements. In many areas, Akbayan members, too caught up in their particular lines of work, have at times not given enough attention to party-building.

For Akbayan members working at the local level, the months leading to the Akbayan congress in January 2001 and then the months leading to the May 2001 elections were very hectic. In the pre-congress period, local Akbayan members were into their usual engagements in participatory governance, development work, mass actions, etc. Aside from this, however, they also intensified their efforts in party recruitment, conducting basic orientation

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with Adelia Macinas, former barangay councilor, Inarado, Daraga, 31 October 2002, in Daraga.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Magayanes, 30 March 2002.

<sup>127</sup> Akbayan 1998, p. 3.

seminars and organizational meetings, and they built party chapters, sections and divisions. Since number of party units determined the number of delegates to the party congress, local Akbayan activists tried to recruit as many as possible. In many areas, recruitment proceeded in a haphazard manner. Local party members no longer discussed thoroughly the background of each potential recruit before endorsing their membership application. Or orientation seminars would be poorly prepared. Sometimes, as in Victoria and Governor Generoso, the distinctions between POs and Akbayan became blurred, with members of one thinking that they were automatically members of the other, or that membership in one was a prerequisite for the other. This happened especially in areas where the community organizer also happened to be an Akbayan organizer. After the congress, local Akbayan members immediately had to attend to final preparations for the election campaign. Then came the campaign itself.

Local party units conducted post-election assessments and analyses, but after these, many of them no longer functioned well. During my fieldwork in 2002, I discovered that some units did not really exist anymore – they had not met for almost a year. While many local Akbayan units were wobbling, the Akbayan-aligned POs/NGOs and the political blocs were very much alive and kicking. The members of these POs/NGOs and the political blocs continued to be active in Akbayan mass actions and activities, but many of them did not belong to an Akbayan unit that regularly met. Some thought that their engagement in mass movements, development work, etc. sufficed. PO/NGO members involved in Batman, for instance, considered such involvement as their work for Akbayan.

Compounding the problem of many non-functioning or not-too-well-functioning local party units was the absence of intermediate party organs. In mid-2002, Akbayan had a total of 76 divisions. (It was open to question just how functional some of them or their lower units really were.) The national council and the national executive committee had to supervise and coordinate the work of all these divisions directly, as there were no regional bodies of a regular nature to assist them. Mindanao did have its own commission, but this was only a consultative body. With the void in the intermediate bodies, I came across various informal, even unusual, arrangements in the flow of party communications. Instead of passing normal party channels, directives or other communications from a national party organ would be relayed to someone in a political bloc, NGO or PO at the national level, then to someone in the latter's regional or local counterpart, and then finally to the local party unit concerned. I

wondered if in the process the integrity of the POs/NGOs concerned was not somehow being compromised.

In September 2002, the Akbayan national council addressed the party's organizational woes. Reviewing the 2000-2001 mass recruitment experience, party leaders acknowledged the lapses committed. They candidly assessed the status of local party units as follows: "[M]embership in the majority of [Akbayan's] divisions have no clear delineation or structuring at the municipal and barangay levels. Moreover, after the 2001 elections, our party units are faced with the problem of inactive party organizations, problematic party leadership, or worse, party units whose members and/or leaders are found to shift their support to other political parties or party-list organizations." In the light of this, the national council undertook organizational consolidation. The party conducted a check of all local party units from the barangay to the provincial levels. It re-certified functioning units, reconstituted ailing ones and declared non-functioning ones dissolved. To prevent a recurrence of the 2000-2001 experience, the national council stressed diligent compliance with set guidelines on recruitment and on the building of party units.<sup>128</sup> Then it embarked on the process of building regional bodies, creating more regional consultative bodies with the view of eventually turning them into regular committees.

The future of the political blocs – Bisig, Padayon and Pandayan<sup>129</sup> – has been a recurrent topic of discussion within Akbayan. Since the party's founding congress, the ideological and political positions of the three blocs have moved so much closer to one another that it is often difficult to discern what substantial differences remain. Moreover, at least half of Akbayan's current members do not belong to any of the blocs. As mentioned in Chapter II, frictions and disputes have arisen from time to time between members of different blocs or between bloc and non-bloc party members. Some non-bloc members have complained, for instance, that bloc members put bloc interest above that of the party's, or that bloc members give preferential treatment to bloc colleagues. Or that bloc meetings and activities are an unnecessary extra burden, what with all the PO/NGO and Akbayan concerns to take care of. Bloc members have replied, however, that cases of bloc preferential treatment are overblown. They have argued that the blocs draw lessons and insights from the rich experience of the left traditions from which they came; that the blocs on many occasions have taken the lead in tackling major ideological questions; and that differences

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<sup>128</sup> Akbayan National Council 2002, p. 1.

between the blocs, even if sometimes only on tactical positions and in styles and methods of work, do contribute to livelier discussions and debates within a “pluralist” party. The political bloc question remains hanging, but both bloc and non-bloc party members agree that the resolution of the question depends largely on the development of deeper ideological unity within the party.<sup>130</sup>

Together with organizational consolidation, Akbayan has also pursued ideological consolidation. In the first few years of Akbayan’s existence (1998-2001), its program for the political education of its members<sup>131</sup> consisted of not much more than the party’s basic orientation seminar. This was all to be expected of a new party. But an additional factor for such a low level was that many members of Akbayan, somewhat in reaction to the highly acrimonious polemics between “reaffirmists” and “rejectionists” of the preceding years, tended to steer clear of deep discussions and debates on major theoretical questions in left politics. Akbayan leaders soon realized that strengthening the party required deeper ideological grounding of its members. They broke with the usual practice of left parties of coming up with a party “ideology,” as, in their view, this often ended up being treated as absolute truth. Somewhat influenced by postmodernism, Akbayan leaders opted to build an open-ended “Akbayan narrative.” Starting in the second half of 2002, Akbayan leaders promoted deeper theoretical discussions and debate within the party through political education seminars. Initially, the topics included deeper analyses of the national and the international situation, the “Akbayan narrative” and the party’s strategy and tactics. Then the seminars ventured into such discourses as state and civil society; political parties and social movements; reform and revolution; the Philippine political spectrum and comparative ideology; the national question and ethnicity; ethics and morality in politics; etc. Akbayan’s education committee drew up ambitious plans for advanced and specialized courses with education kits. As in popular political education seminars, however, there was a great lack of education materials, especially in the vernacular languages. Most of the materials used were drafts; the “Akbayan narrative” document itself was finalized and approved only at the July 2003 congress. Despite all the limitations, Akbayan members at various levels responded enthusiastically to the political education seminars, which were marked by very lively and extended discussions.

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<sup>129</sup> Since 1999, the popdems have ceased to be a distinct political bloc within Akbayan. They now count among the non-bloc members of Akbayan.

<sup>130</sup> Based on interviews and discussions with members of the Akbayan national council and political education committee.



For their operations, local Akbayan units rely mainly on the voluntary efforts of individual members. Finance-wise, these units have meager resources and their sources of funds are still quite limited. Many units have tried to be diligent in collecting membership dues.<sup>132</sup> Akbayan has also collected special fees from party members who have secured a public office (through elections or by appointment) with the help of the party. At election time, local party units have often managed to get donations in cash or kind (e.g., election campaign posters or sample ballots) from politicians and businessmen. From my inquiries with local party leaders, I ascertained that donations or contributions from NGOs or NGO-based individuals also constituted an important source of local party funds. NGOs further assisted local Akbayan units by hiring party “full-timers” for part-time jobs or by farming out short-term contractual work to them just so as to help them earn some income.

### ***The Process of Building an Akbayan Political-Electoral Base at the Grassroots Level***

One of the ways by which Akbayan can perhaps be best distinguished from traditional parties as well as from other left parties is the way that it operates and conducts itself at the grassroots level. As at the national level, traditional parties at the local level are loose formations revolving around elite clans and factions that rely a great deal on clientelism to maintain their hold on power, and that shift parties whenever it is convenient. As a party espousing “new politics,” Akbayan seeks to build both a solid party organization and a broad political-electoral base at the grassroots level that actively participate not just in elections and local governance but also in the mass movement. Like other left electoral parties, Akbayan has been very much involved in contentious politics, the party-list vote and congressional work. Unlike them, however, Akbayan has also been very much engaged in local politics and in development work.

Out in the field, I often could not get a good idea of Akbayan’s overall framework in its multi-sided political work at the local level. Akbayan was into mass movements and contentious politics, development work, elections, government work and governance, party-building, etc. Yet there seemed to be

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<sup>131</sup> This is distinct from *popular* or mass political education, which is geared for members of POs.

<sup>132</sup> P1 per month for unemployed; P1 per week for those employed earning less than the minimum wage; and 1 percent of for those employed earning above the minimum wage.

not much written about an overall framework or schema. I realized, however, when I tried to put together the data I had gathered that a framework was emerging. For a more concrete and graphic representation of such a framework, I thought in terms of what Akbayan was doing in its efforts to build a political-electoral base at the grassroots level. Through my interviews and discussions with some members of the Akbayan's Executive Committee and National Council, I was able to piece together how Akbayan envisages this process of base-building.<sup>133</sup> (See the matrix of this process on pp. 274-5.) As I had been raising questions and sharing my observations and comments in the course of my interactions with them, some of the points they raised already took into account, or were in fact responses to, the problems I had come across during my fieldwork. The base-building process I describe is by no means a comprehensive framework of Akbayan's political work at the local level.

As explained by Akbayan leaders with whom I talked, the party's base-building flows from its engagement in both civil society and the LGU, in both the mass movement and local governance and development work. As at the national level, Akbayan wages a struggle against elite hegemony at the local level in both civil society and the state and works for the deepening of democracy in both spheres – “double democratization,” to paraphrase Held. Akbayan aspires to eventually become the governing party in the LGU. It also seeks to provide political direction and leadership to organizations and groups in civil society, while fully respecting their autonomy.

The process of transforming a *trapo*-controlled area (“yellow area”) into an Akbayan political-electoral base or a “bailiwick of new politics” (“red area”) requires integrated efforts in the LGU, in civil society and in party building. The “features” of yellow, light orange, dark orange and red areas presented in Annex A are idealized representations. They are intended to emphasize what Akbayan leaders see as the need for a relatively balanced and well-rounded development. (A municipality may be considered “dark orange” if most of its features do exhibit such a color, but it may still have one or two “light orange” features, indicating that there is some catching up to do in these categories.) Two types of expansion areas (light orange) are indicated – one that has been opened mainly via the “LGU route” and one opened via the “civil society route.” It must be noted

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<sup>133</sup> Interviews and discussions with Delima; Maritona Labajo, secretary-general, Akbayan, 2 December 2002, in Quezon City; Carmel Abao, member, National Executive Committee, Akbayan, 3 December 2002, in Quezon City; and Joel Rocamora, president, Akbayan, 15 January 2003, in Quezon City; discussion with ad hoc committee preparing for conference with Akbayan LGU officials, 28 November 2002.

that “LGU route” expansion areas have an “undeveloped” civil society side; “civil society route” expansion areas, an “undeveloped” LGU side. This points out the need for those working in “LGU route” areas to do organizing work in civil society too; and for those in “civil society route” areas, to get into LGU work too.

Akbayan leaders believe that since *trapos* dominate and are very much entrenched in local politics, it will take a long and complicated process for Akbayan to dislodge them and to become the governing party in a good number of municipalities. First, Akbayan would have to reach out to, and forge good relations with, as many state reformists and potential allies within the municipal and barangay LGUs. It would also have to try to get as many state reformists and allies elected or appointed to LGU positions. Once a mayor who is a progressive or an ally gets elected, Akbayan would have to help revamp or transform the local civilian bureaucracy and put an end to corruption and maladministration. After some time of working closely with state reformists and allies, Akbayan would have to try to draw them away from *trapo* as well as neoliberal politics and towards left politics, and to recruit them eventually into Akbayan. As Akbayan, in most areas, does not yet have a machinery strong enough to ensure the victory of progressives at the local level on its own, it has to make a tactical compromise: Many of these politician-recruits would have to go through a period of double-party membership – traditional party and Akbayan – and run under traditional parties while supporting Akbayan in the party-list vote. Once Akbayan has achieved enough national stature, it would have to put an end to the double-party arrangement and ask its politician-recruits to choose between the traditional parties and Akbayan.

In Akbayan’s engagement in civil society, party leaders believe that it has to take an active role helping build and strengthen POs and NGOs, while fully respecting their independence and autonomy. In their view, Akbayan would have to keep close track of the development of societal organizations and to strive to help provide political direction and leadership in the mass movements and in popular participation in local governance and development work. It would have to make sure that the struggle against elite hegemony in civil society does not lag behind that in LGU work, and vice versa. Raising the citizens’ awareness through dialogical political education seminars and in the course of everyday integration is crucial in fighting clientelism and dirty *trapo* methods in the ideological and cultural spheres.

Engrossed in their activities in the mass movements, local governance and development work, Akbayan members in some areas have tended to neglect

## Process of Building an Akbayan Political-Electoral Base (Municipal Level)

Type of area	Brief Description	Local Government				Civil Society			Akbayan
		Executive branch	Legislative branch	Barangay organization	People's organizations	Non-gov'tal organizations	Citizens' awareness		
Yellow area (Trapo area)	Trapo-controlled LGU; weak or politically inactive societal organizations	Mayor – trapo; Civil bureaucracy controlled by trapo mayor.	Municipal council controlled by trapos	LB and BCs – very much controlled by trapos	Hardly any progressive POs in municipality	Hardly any progressive NGOs operating in municipality	No popular pol-ed; voters unable to resist/ counter dirty trapo methods	No Akbayan chapter; no Akbayan members organizing in municipality	
Light orange area (Expansion area – via 'LGU route')	TAs or SRs have upper hand in LGU; weak or politically inactive societal organizations	Mayor – TA or SR; has won over civil bureaucracy.	SRs/TAs occupy seat or seats in municipal council	LB and BCs – still controlled by trapos but by trapos and TAs SRs and TAs manage to exert some influence	Hardly any progressive POs in municipality	Hardly any progressive NGOs operating in municipality	Popular pol-ed initiated; voters manage to resist/counter dirty trapo methods to some extent	Akbayan chapter/s being set up or already set up in one or several barangays	
Light orange area (Expansion area – via 'civil society route')	TT-controlled LGU; emergent societal organizations	Mayor – TT; Civil bureaucracy controlled by TT mayor.	Municipal council controlled by trapos	LB and BCs – very much controlled by trapos	Some progressive POs in municipality	One or a few progressive NGOs operating in municipality servicing POs	Popular pol-ed initiated; voters manage to resist/counter dirty trapo methods to some extent	Akbayan chapter/s being set up or already set up in one or several barangays	
Dark orange area (Consolidation area)	SRs have upper hand in LGU; strong and politically active societal organizations	Mayor – SR; has won over civil bureaucracy.	SRs have majority in municipal council	SRs have upper hand in LB and most BCs	Many prog. POs in area; POs actively participate in rights/welfare issues and in governance/ development.	Several prog. NGOs operating in municipality; NGOs actively participate in rights/welfare issues and in governance/ development.	Popular pol-ed deepening; voters resist/ counter dirty trapo methods to greater extent.	Active Akbayan section	
Red area (Akbayan base or bailiwick)	Akbayan is local governing party; strong and politically active societal organizations	Mayor – AMU; has won over civil bureaucracy.	AMUs have majority in municipal council	AMUs have upper hand in LB and most BCs	Progressive POs in all major sectors; POs confederated and actively participate in rights/welfare issues and in governance/ development.	Several/many prog. NGOs operating in municipality; NGOs comprehensively service POs; NGOs actively participate in rights/welfare issues and in governance/ development.	Popular pol-ed extensively and intensively conducted; voters effectively resist/ counter dirty trapo methods.	Active Akbayan section with active chapters in all barangays.	

## Legend: Definition of Terms; Classification of Politicians

I. **Trapo** – engages in the politics of patronage, vote-buying, fraud and/or terrorism

### Types of *trapos*:

- 1) **Trapong-trapo (TT)** – engages in the worst of *trapo* politics; tactical alliance with him/her inadvisable.
- 2) **Tactical ally (TA)** – engages in the milder, non-violent form of *trapo* politics, supports certain development-oriented or pro-people initiatives and is willing to work with progressives in certain concerns.

(Note: If it is still unclear whether a politician is TT or TA, he/she is simply referred to as *trapo*.)

II. **State reformist (SR)** – promotes institutional reforms and social development (including people's participation in governance) to achieve good governance.

### Types of SRs:

- 1) **Neoliberal State Reformist (NSR)** – believes that popular empowerment can be achieved within the existing social order without the need for structural change.
- 2) **Left of Left-leaning State Reformist (LSR)** – views popular empowerment as requiring a structural change of economic and political relations in society.

### Types of LSRs:

- a) **Non-Akbayan Member (NAM)** – engages in “new politics” but is not an Akbayan member.
- b) **Double-Party Member (DPM)** – engages in “new politics” but is a member of both Akbayan and a *trapo* party. His/her primary allegiance may be with Akbayan, with the *trapo* party or unclear.
- c) **Akbayan Member – Unhyphenated (AMU)** – a full-fledged and solid Akbayan member who is not a member of any other political party. (The term “unhyphenated” is used here in connection with the common practice of *trapos* to run with several party affiliations and endorsements, strung together on campaign materials with hyphens, e.g. LAKAS-NUCD-KAMPI-PPC-Bayan Muna.)

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Other abbreviations used:

LGU – Local Government Unit  
LB – *Liga ng mga Barangay* (League of Barangays)  
BC – Barangay captain

the building of a solid party organization at the grassroots level. Akbayan leaders have thus stressed the importance of party-building – strong chapters at the barangay level, sections at the municipal level and divisions at the inter-municipal or provincial level – and the need to integrate party-building in doing political work in both civil society and the LGU.

The process of building an Akbayan political-electoral base is not a simple linear progression. A local Akbayan organization in a “deep orange area” could commit serious errors or suffer political setbacks and the municipality could very well revert to “light orange” status. Akbayan leaders feel confident, however, that for as long as there has been significant effort at all-rounded political work, the local Akbayan would have the means to get back on its feet. For instance, a major defeat in local elections could result in the virtual destruction of Akbayan’s network of progressives and allies within an LGU, but if there is a strong party organization and allied PO-NGO network, these could very well continue with their work, rectify whatever mistakes have been committed and set the stage for a comeback in the next elections.

## Conclusion

In this study on democratization and the left in post-authoritarian Philippines, I have put forward a three-part argument. The first part questions the one-sided and top-down character of predominant interpretations of Philippine politics (the patron-client model, the neocolonial/ dependency interpretation and the patrimonial/elite-democracy framework), and presents an alternative interpretation combining “elite democracy” with “democracy from below.” The Philippines, I argue, is a *contested democracy* in which members of the oligarchic elite seek to maintain a truncated form of formal democracy that they can easily manipulate and dominate (“elite democracy”), and in which major sections of the poor and marginalized classes, sectors and communities, together with some allies from the middle and upper classes, struggle for a more participatory and egalitarian democracy (“democracy from below”). The *deepening of democracy* in the Philippines, the second part of my argument, mainly involves the transformation of an elite-dominated formal democracy into a participatory and egalitarian one, and the process is a struggle of “democracy from below” versus “elite democracy.” The third part contends that while the Maoist CPP is an undemocratic force and remains a threat to Philippine democracy, new left parties and groups that are democratically oriented have gotten into the thick of the fight for “democracy from below” and are contributing to the deepening of democracy in the Philippines.

Chapter I has specifically dealt with the first two parts of my argument and Chapter II advances the third part. Chapters III-VII have delved into the left’s political engagements in various arenas or lines of work – civil society, elections, public office and governance, popular political education, work for political reforms, and local work. These chapters expound on the third part of my argument, but they also relate to the first two parts. The experiences in the different arenas of the left, particularly the emergent left parties and groups, show the complicatedness of the contestation between “elite democracy” and “democracy from below,” and the problems and difficulties that were or are still being confronted by those working for the deepening of democracy.

In this conclusion, I take up certain salient points that have been touched upon in the preceding chapters, but need to be synthesized. These have to do with the complexity of the contest over democracy, the difficulties confronted in the deepening of democracy, as well as the long and continuing process of the democratization of the left itself. I shall also examine the Philippines' contested democracy and the emergent left's role in democratization in comparative perspective, adding to comparisons in previous chapters between the Philippines and other developing countries. Lastly, I explore the prospects for the deepening of democracy in the Philippines and the role that the emergent left parties and groups could play in this process.

### ***Salient Points regarding Contested Democracy and the Left in the Philippines***

On the basis simply of the presentation in the early part of this dissertation (pp. 1-88), "contested democracy" and the "deepening of democracy" could still seem somewhat too general and abstract. This is understandably so, since the discussion in this early part was largely theoretical. Subsequent chapters, dealing mainly with the left's engagement in various spheres and lines of work, show contested democracy and the deepening of democracy in more concrete terms. The experiences of the left, particularly the emergent left parties and groups and allied POs/NGOs, in striving to give form and direction to "democracy from below" illustrate that the contest over democracy in the Philippines is a complicated process and that the fight to transform a deficient formal democracy into a participatory and egalitarian one is a tough, uphill struggle.

True to their avowed objectives and priorities, political blocs and groups of the emergent left engaged in organizing, popular political education and other forms of "mass work" among the poor and marginalized classes, sectors and communities, and identified with their issues and concerns. The new left groups recruited the great majority of their members from these classes and sectors and built chapters at the grassroots level. In contrast to the traditional parties dominated by the elite, they strove to acquire a truly "mass" character.

In struggling against elite rule, the emergent left groups fought in different arenas or lines of work, opening new arenas at crucial periods, and striving to master the nuances and intricacies of working in each arena. They started out in the familiar arena of the "mass movement," which increasingly



The congresspersons of the emergent left parties have been vigorously working for progressive legislation, coordinating closely with POs/NGOs engaging in both mass protest actions in the streets as well as in lobbying. With regards political and electoral reforms, for instance, the solons of the new left groups have pushed for measures promoting fuller participation and representation of marginalized sectors and for curbing elite domination and manipulation of political processes and institutions. In public office and governance, however, the most notable achievement of the new left has been at the local level. Seizing the opportunities provided by government decentralization, Akbayan and allied POs/NGOs have undertaken projects in participatory local governance, most especially in development planning, that have produced very creditable results. From the barangay level, the groups involved are now moving up to the municipal level. Akbayan has managed to draw and even “recruit” many progressive local officials into its ranks. The “recruitment,” however, has a certain degree of ambiguity in the sense that most of the recruited officials still run under traditional parties at election time.

In fighting elite rule, the new left parties and groups have had to contend with the patronage, corruption, fraud, coercion and violence of the *trapos* and the traditional parties. Perhaps more significantly, they have also had to wage battles against the elite in the ideological and cultural spheres. They have had to controvert ideas and notions that democracy equals elections; that democracy can be deepened simply by “strengthening civil society” and promoting “good governance” without actively struggling against the patrimonial elite; that elections are about money and gun politics and not about legitimacy, fairness and democratic processes; etc. The new left groups have also had to fight against a most pervasive and pernicious *trapo* political culture of nepotism, cronyism, distorted extended kinships, bribery, influence-peddling, pork barreling, the spoils system, vote-buying, “boss” culture, etc. Apart from tangling with *trapos*, the new left groups have had to deal with harassment and even violence from the extreme left, which regards other left groups as “renegades” and “counter-revolutionaries.”

After “jueteng-gate,” the emergent left parties and groups and allied POs/NGOs were among those at the forefront of the campaign in 2000-1 for the ouster of President Estrada, who, like Marcos, had become the quintessential symbol of patrimonial politics. Compared to the *trapos* and the traditional parties, however, the new left groups were still very weak. Thus, the leadership of the broad “Oust Estrada” movement passed into the hands of anti-Estrada

became subsumed to a broader arena known as “civil society.” In their engagement in civil society, most groups focused primarily on contentious politics, but some mainly went into development work. Traditionally a strong point of the left, contentious politics was largely directed at fighting elite domination or control of the country’s wealth and power. From merely “exposing and opposing,” the new left groups moved on to “proposing” too and learned to be good at “programmatic demand-making.” In their engagement in contentious politics, the emergent left groups sometimes had to compete with the Maoist left, which sought to instrumentalize the mass movement for its “protracted people’s war.” In the early 1990s, the emergent left groups oriented mainly towards contentious politics ventured into development work, ostensibly a more “constructive” line of work, or went into it more seriously than before. The new left groups hoped to prove the superiority of their development initiatives to those of the *trapos*, and to present concrete evidence of a viable alternative system.

In the midst of the great hurrah for “civil society” (of the associational type) in the early 1990s, the political blocs and groups of the new left beat back a strong move that emerged within their own ranks for an amorphous “NGO movement” to take the place of a political party. What would be the point of a “strong” civil society if state power ultimately remained in the hands of the traditional parties of the elite? Although the new left groups became fully convinced of the need for a political party to challenge the *trapo* parties, it took them some time to actually set up such a party. Due to continuing ideological and political differences, and at times also the personal differences of leaders, the political blocs and groups formed several parties, not just one.

The 1998 general elections provided the emergent left parties with their electoral breakthrough – a few seats in the House of Representatives (through the party-list system), and in the case of Akbayan and Sanlakas, also some positions in a few municipal governments. In subsequent elections, not all of the new left parties managed to retain their seats in the legislature. Only Akbayan actually managed to increase its party-list seats to the maximum (three), and win some more local posts. Meanwhile, the NDs have doubled their seats from three to six by setting up more party-list groups. Despite all the efforts of the left parties and groups, *trapo* parties still control 90 percent of the seats in the lower house of Congress, and are still the ruling entities in almost 100 percent of local governments.

factions of the elite. EDSA II was “people power” against a corrupt president, but it did not bring about structural change. A section of the elite merely took over the reins of power from another section of elite.

As mentioned in the introduction, Huber et alia as well as Laclau and Mouffe see the deepening of democracy in terms of a movement from formal liberal democracy into a more egalitarian one. (Huber et alia refer to this egalitarian democracy as “social democracy,” while Laclau and Mouffe, “radical democracy.”) In the Philippines, the struggle for an egalitarian society has been most clearly manifested in the struggles of the poor and marginalized classes, sectors and communities. Due to the wide rich-poor gap, class struggle continues to be the most prominent of the country’s social conflicts. The clamor of the poor for social justice remains as strong as ever. For a more equitable distribution of the country’s wealth, all the emergent left groups argue for some form of socialism-cum-democracy (or an egalitarian democracy) as a long-term goal. For the short term, they have vigorously pushed for such measures as agrarian reform, increased workers’ wages, low-cost housing for the urban poor, etc. Another major conflict involving equality (apart, of course, from national self-determination) has been that between ethnic communities – the “Christian-Filipino” majority, on one hand and the Moros and “indigenous peoples” on the other. While upholding the Moros’ and indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination, the new left groups have advocated for federalism or genuine regional autonomy for minority peoples and for an end to all forms of ethnic and religious discrimination. Thus far, the emergent left forces have not been any more successful than the rebel movements – the Maoist insurgency and the Moro secessionist movements – in putting an end to the grave class and ethnic disparities, which in fact have continued to worsen. The women’s movement in the Philippines, in which the new left parties and groups have been active participants, has been more successful in pushing for gender equality. Nonetheless, as one well-known feminist has put it, the gains made have been “mostly in the public sphere, not in the private sphere.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Huber et alia, the deepening of democracy from a formal to a social or egalitarian democracy passes through an intermediate system known as “participatory democracy,” which has the features of formal democracy plus one other dimension: “high levels of participation without systematic differences across social categories.” An egalitarian democracy has all the features of participatory democracy, plus “increasing equality in social and economic

outcomes.”<sup>2</sup> The Latin American experience appears to bear out that the process of the deepening of democracy does put the stress, sequentially speaking, on the participatory dimension before the equality dimension. According to Roberts, the Latin American left, in working for the deepening of democracy in their region, have directed more of their attention to the political aspect (i.e., promoting popular participation in the decision-making process) than to the extension of democratic norms to the socioeconomic sphere (i.e., pushing for increased equality in social and economic outcomes). Roberts attributes this to the rise of grassroots popular organizations that are well placed to foster popular participation in local decision-making arenas, as well as to the left’s inadequacies in coming up with a concrete alternative to the capitalist mode of production, and problems in setting democratic controls over the national economy in the era of globalization.<sup>3</sup> A similar sequence appears to be unfolding for the emergent left parties and groups in the Philippines. Their emphasis now is on participatory democracy, which they believe can greatly facilitate the strategic objective of an egalitarian democracy. To describe its “narrative,” Akbayan has adopted the slogan “Participatory democracy, participatory socialism,” which captures the basic elements of its strategic thrusts.<sup>4</sup> The “people power” uprisings of 1986 and 2001 have provided a major impetus for the push for participatory democracy and “popular empowerment” in the Philippines – a factor that is absent or not as marked in most countries of Latin America. The new left groups hope to help organize and channel the popular cognition of “people power” in the toppling of corrupt presidents to political decision-making processes that go on every day from the local to the national levels.

To become positive forces for the deepening of democracy in the Philippines, large sections of the emergent left parties and groups have had to undergo a process of democratization themselves. All of the new left parties and groups have had to guard against inducements and cooptation by *trapos* and against the corrosions of *trapo* political culture. In addition, however, those coming from the ND tradition have also had to break from certain dogmas of traditional Marxism-Leninism and rethink long-held views about the country’s “bourgeois” or “elite” democracy. The first major break came about during the CPP split when the “rejectionists” renounced Stalinism and Maoism, including the concept of a permanent “vanguard party.” This paved the way for the

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<sup>1</sup> Discussion with Carol Añonuevo, 19 June 2004, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

<sup>2</sup> Huber et al. 1997, p. 324.

<sup>3</sup> Roberts 1998, pp. 32-3.

<sup>4</sup> Akbayan National Congress 2003.

acceptance by the “rejectionists” of political pluralism and of a plural or pluralist democracy. (Laclau and Mouffe’s conceptualization of a “radical *and plural* democracy” therefore has particular resonance for the Philippine left.) The FOPA conference of 1993 provided the second major break, as certain left groups ceased to dismiss post-Marcos democracy as simply being “fake” or “bourgeois,” and thus worthy only of being dismantled, overthrown and smashed. They recognized the intrinsic value of democratic processes and institutions, and saw the possibilities for transforming a formal democracy into a more substantive one; and an “elite democracy” into a participatory and egalitarian one. Thus, they shifted from an instrumental to an integral view of democracy. Not all the emergent left groups, however, have made the decisive shift. Because of the propensity of the Philippines for tumults and ruptures like the EDSA I, II and III uprisings, some groups still entertain the prospect of a Jacobin-style revolution. Thus, they have tended to straddle the instrumental-integral divide, and this has greatly affected their engagement in civil society, elections, public office and governance.

### ***The Philippines’ Contested Democracy in Comparative Perspective***

The developing world is strewn with elite-dominated formal democracies, patrimonial states, weak states captured by strong oligarchic forces, clientelist electoral regimes, boss-democracies, semi-democracies and states belonging to various diminished subtypes of democracy. The Philippines is by no means the only deficient formal democracy in which the rule of an entrenched elite is being challenged by popular forces striving for empowerment and social and economic equality. Comparisons of Philippine democracy with democracies in other developing countries would show that the paradigm of “contested democracy,” where “elite democracy” contends with “democracy from below,” is applicable to many other developing countries, especially new or “newly-restored” democracies. Comparisons would also be helpful in showing why forces of “democracy from below” in certain countries would find it more difficult to fight elite rule than those in other countries.

As regards “elite democracy” and its variations, a good number of excellent comparative studies (or studies with incisive comparative sections) have already been made. Three of the authors on variations of the “elite-democracy” model (Hutchcroft, Sidel and Franco), for instance, provide very thought-provoking and useful analyses of different types of patrimonialism

(Hutchcroft), bossism (Sidel) and both clientelism and electoralism (Franco). Hutchcroft makes the distinction between its “patrimonial oligarchic state” and the “patrimonial bureaucratic states” of Thailand, Indonesia and Zaire. The elite in the former is a powerful oligarchic class that preys upon a weak state bureaucracy, while the elite in the latter is a bureaucratic elite that rides roughshod over weak social forces. In Hutchcroft’s view, the patrimonial oligarchic state is more obdurate to change than a patrimonial administrative state as bureaucratic incoherence and the great clout of the oligarchic class hinder reforms. After comparing the Philippine experience with “bossism” with those of other countries, particularly in Southeast Asia, Sidel appears to have found additional evidence for linking the rise of bossism with electoral democracy and early capital accumulation. Franco came up with her four types of “less-than-democratic regimes” – electoral authoritarian, clientelist electoral, militarized electoral, and demilitarizing electoral – from a review of Latin American transitions in the 1980s. She likened the Philippines’ (national) clientelist electoral regime and local authoritarian enclaves to those of Brazil after 1985 and Mexico since 1988.

The Philippines generally fits the description of a “truncated” or “deficient” form of formal democracy in Huber et alia’s typology drawn from Latin American democracies. While it has competitive elections and universal suffrage, it falls short in some of the other criteria, such as accountability of the state’s administrative organs to elected representatives and protection against arbitrary state action. A truncated formal democracy is not at all new to the Philippines. To some extent, the deficiencies in contemporary Philippine democracy were already present in the early decades of the postcolonial state. Then (as now), the virtual stranglehold on economic and political power of the country’s oligarchic elite blocked the attainment of complete formal democracy and its deepening into participatory and egalitarian democracy. Worse, it helped usher in a 14-year period of authoritarian rule.

As a truncated or deficient formal democracy, the Philippines may be worse off compared to many Latin American countries. The Philippines suffers from the same defects that afflict the truncated formal democracies of Latin America as mentioned by Huber et al. – weak accountability, uneven protection of civil and political rights and patrimonial practices. However, while Latin American democracies generally meet the criteria of free and fair elections, the high incidence of vote-buying, other forms of fraud and violence that attend Philippine elections puts great doubt over the actual free-ness and fairness of

these polls. Huber et al. have warned of the possibility of a vicious cycle of inegalitarian policies in Latin American countries leading to poverty, marginalization and crime, and to the corrosion of political and civil rights and to a “delegative democracy” with sharply diminished government accountability. With social disparities now worse than in the pre-authoritarian and even the early post-authoritarian years, it can perhaps be said that the vicious cycle of inegalitarian policies and stagnation already besets the Philippines.

Because of failings in horizontal accountability and in the protection of civil rights, Guillermo O’Donnell has included the Philippines among the world’s “delegative democracies” and Fareed Zakaria, “illiberal democracies,” respectively.<sup>5</sup> As an “illiberal democracy,” the Philippines would belong to that “diminished subtype” of democracy where civil liberties are incomplete, as described by David Collier and Steven Levitsky.<sup>6</sup>

The deepening of democracy, as in the transition to democracy, involves contestation, especially among different classes and class coalitions. Based on their studies of capitalist development and democracy in advanced capitalist countries, Latin America and the Caribbean, Rueschemeyer et al. have asserted the centrality of class power to the process of democratization – that democratization was both pushed forward and opposed by class interest, that on the whole, subordinate classes fought for democracy and classes benefiting from the status quo resisted democracy, and that this centrality holds for both the processes of achieving formal democracy and of advancing towards participatory and egalitarian democracy.<sup>7</sup> A similar contestation has marked the entire process of the deepening of democracy in the Philippines, covering not just the post-Marcos period, but the postcolonial era (excluding the interregnum of Marcos’ authoritarian rule). Ever since the Philippines gained independence in 1946, there has been a drawn-out struggle between the entrenched economic-political elite and the poor and marginalized classes, sectors and communities over the meaning and substance of democracy. Parties and groups of the elite have mainly promoted the minimalist concept of democracy, while those linked with subordinate classes have called for civil and political rights, popular participation and social justice.

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<sup>5</sup> O’Donnell 1994; and Zakaria 1997, p. 22. By illiberal democracy, Zakaria meant political systems that were democratic – i.e., having free, fair and competitive elections – but that did not ensure constitutional liberalism – “the rule of law, a separation of powers, and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion and property.”

<sup>6</sup> Collier and Levitsky 1997, pp. 440-41. It must be pointed out that the concepts of democracy of O’Donnell, Zakaria, and Collier and Levitsky are all of the medium-range.

<sup>7</sup> Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, pp. 46, 270; Huber et al. 1997, p. 323.

In many parts of the developing world, forces of “democracy from below” are challenging the dominance of the entrenched elite rule in truncated formal democracies. In some of the other post-authoritarian states of Southeast and East Asia, notably South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia, and in parts of South Asia, movements of poor and marginalized classes, sectors and communities – workers, peasants, women, urban poor, etc. – have become active again in recent years. The issues they have raised have ranged from labor repression and rights to land, water and forests, etc., all the way to neoliberal globalization. As in the Philippines, the popular organizations and movements have been aided by NGOs that have largely dedicated themselves to the empowerment of the poor, deprived and marginalized. Subordinate classes in Southeast and East Asia continue to be largely unrepresented in government, as many grassroots movements have eschewed active engagement in electoral politics and even links with political parties. There are, however, hopeful signs of change (apart from the modest electoral gains of the emergent left parties and groups in the Philippines). In South Korea, the left-wing Democratic Labor Party has made it to the national parliament for the first time and emerged as the nation’s third largest party, winning ten seats in the April 2004 elections.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, in South Asia, in the Indian state of Kerala, volunteer organizations headed by the People’s Science Movement, with the support of some parties and groups in the Left Front, have successfully spearheaded huge campaigns for civil action and community development cooperation, which have drawn tremendous popular participation, promoted further democratization and helped improve government performance.<sup>9</sup>

Latin America appears to be the region where the efforts at transforming elite democracy into a more participatory and egalitarian democracy – from below – appear to be making more headway. As in the Philippines, Latin American countries have long been dominated by clientelistic and oligarchic elites. In recent years, virtually all over the region, massive protests of workers, peasants, urban poor, indigenous people, students and the middle classes have broken out against the neoliberal policies of the 1990s and the corrupt political elite – both widely blamed for the worsening poverty and social disparities and for recession or even economic collapse. Waves of people power have swept out governments wedded to neoliberalism and tarnished by corruption in Argentina, Peru and Ecuador. Amid the economic and political turmoil, political parties

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<sup>8</sup> Kim 2004, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Tornquist 1999, pp. 146-7; Tornquist 2002, pp. 102-8.



closely linked with the subordinate classes have re-emerged, revitalized or even moved closer to winning power. After building up victories and gains in local polls and national legislative elections and learning how to govern in the 1980s and 90s, the Workers' Party (PT) has come to power in Brazil, and the *Frente Amplio* (Broad Front) in Uruguay now appears to have fair chances of turning from main opposition into ruling party in the next elections. For many popular movements and parties in Latin America, neoliberal populism proved too formidable a force to contend with in the 1990s. The recent social explosions in the region, however, may now make it harder for demagogic politicians to effectively couple neoliberalism and populism.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Emergent Left Parties and the Deepening of Democracy in the Philippines***

As in Latin America and elsewhere, the three clusters of power mentioned by Huber et al. – the balance of class power, the structure of the state and of state-society relations, and international power structures – will shape the conditions for the deepening of democracy in the Philippines. The Philippines currently exhibits conditions similar to those of Latin American democracies, conditions that would hinder the deepening of democracy – political and economic power concentrated in a few, weak state autonomy from dominant class interests, and international pressure for market-oriented but socially inequitable policies. Given the current unfavorable power relations, the Philippines may continue to be a truncated formal democracy for some time, bogged down in the rut of widespread poverty, grave social disparities and simmering civil unrest. In such an unstable political environment, a comeback of authoritarian rule cannot be ruled out.

Possibilities for the deepening of democracy nonetheless remain. The single most important factor is that the mass movement is very much alive and has manifested in various ways its power, adaptability, resilience... and unpredictability. It has been greatly aided by modern mass media and electronic communications. Over the last few years, the mass movement has succeeded in getting unfair electricity surcharges quashed; thwarted the self-serving moves of leading politicians to amend the constitution; frustrated the politically-motivated moves of certain politicians to impeach the Supreme Court Chief Justice on

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<sup>10</sup> The unexpected affinities between populism and neoliberalism are discussed in Roberts 1995; and Weyland, 1999.

flimsy grounds; forced the government to withdraw Philippine troops from Iraq; and most of all, ousted another corrupt president in another awesome display of “people power.” To be sure, the mass movement has not succeeded in getting many, even most, of its various – sometimes conflicting – demands, and it has not gotten anywhere near the point of threatening the very continuance of elite rule. Moreover, as EDSA III clearly showed, it can still be vulnerable to clientelist and populist appeals. “Democracy from below,” however, no longer confines itself to the mass movement. It has branched out into other arenas. And emergent left forces are working hard to help give it form and direction.

The early part of this conclusion discussed how the new left parties and groups and allied POs/NGOs have engaged in mass work among peasants, workers, urban poor, etc.; how they have moved into the new arenas of development work, elections, public office and governance; how they have had to contend with the patronage, corruption, fraud and violence of the *trapos*, and to wage battles in the ideological and cultural spheres too. I stressed the difficulties that these left groups have been experiencing. This, however, is but one way of looking at their endeavors. Although the emergent left parties and groups are newcomers to the world of development work, elections, public office and governance, they seem to have familiarized themselves and adjusted to their environments relatively fast, and in some respects, have even gained some sophistication. As demonstrated vividly by their endeavors for political and electoral reform, the new left parties and groups have learned how to combine their work in various arenas – rallying in the streets, lobbying in Malacañang and in Congress, engaging in debate on the floor of the House of Representatives and even waging a worldwide campaign among overseas Filipinos. They are becoming adept in combining active involvement in contentious politics with development work and participatory governance; urban work with rural work; engagement at the national level with engagement at the regional and local levels; countering the *trapos*’ “guns, goons, gold” with fighting *trapo* political culture; engaging in political work with party-building; etc. The fight against the rule of the oligarchic elite has been turning more and more from a single-pronged attack (i.e., a largely urban-centered mass movement) into a multi-pronged one, and from a political struggle into an ideological and cultural struggle as well. In the Philippines’ contested democracy, the struggle being waged by the emergent left parties and groups against elite rule is shaping up to be the sharpest expression of the contest between “elite democracy” and “democracy from below.”

To become forces for democratization more fully, the emergent left parties and groups that still straddle the instrumental-integral divide as regards their view of democracy would have to make the decisive shift to the integral view of democracy. That a decrepit “bourgeois democracy” will be toppled and replaced by a shining new socialist democracy through a “revolution” – i.e., a single foundational moment of rupture – is a pie in the sky. There is no completely new order to replace the old order in one swoop. Revolutionary or radical change in the Philippines can only come about through a protracted process with periods of slow, gradual change as well as periods of tumult and rupture. The process cannot but be a movement from an elite-dominated formal democracy to a participatory and egalitarian one. The instrumental view of democracy will continue to serve as a hedge to the engagements in civil society and the state arena of new left groups still influenced by it to some degree. In the drive to build up to a “revolutionary” climax, the left groups concerned would tend to devote too much of their attention and energy to the “expose and oppose” type of contentious politics and too little to development work and local governance. Since Congress serves as a better “propaganda” forum, they would tend to pour almost all of their energies and resources during elections into winning the limited number of party-list seats in the House of Representatives and not attend to building up strength from below by accumulating victories at the local level.

It is certainly politic of the new left parties and groups (including those with an integral view of democracy) to take a proactive stance towards political tumults, ruptures, military revolts, coup attempts and uprisings. The Philippines’ truncated formal democracy does have a propensity for these, and radical changes can at times come about only through storms and ruptures. The new left groups, however, would have to guard against becoming too fascinated with, predisposed to, or prepossessed by, ruptures. In the first place, undemocratic forces from the extreme right and the extreme left, who have no compunctions about using or manipulating other groups, do their utmost to create or precipitate political crises and tumultuous situations that they can exploit for their anti-democratic ends. Moreover, a preoccupation with ruptures would lead to less attention being given to other important lines of work like local governance, development work and sectoral movements.

From the viewpoint of modernization theory, political instability and disorder in “changing societies” – insurgencies, revolts, coups, uprisings, etc. – are, in Huntington’s words, “in large part the product of rapid social change and

the rapid mobilization of new groups into politics coupled with the slow development of political institutions.” In complex societies, he argues, achieving a high level of political community depends a lot on political institutions. Huntington particularly stresses the importance of the political party, “the distinctive institution of modern politics,” whose function is “to organize participation, to aggregate interests, to serve as the link between social forces and the government.”<sup>11</sup>

Applied not so much to “modernization” but to the process of the deepening of democracy in the Philippines, Huntington’s argument has important implications for the emergent left parties and groups. At present, with the new left parties still quite weak, the opposition to elite rule of the poor and marginalized classes, sectors and communities cannot but sometimes break out into storms and ruptures as they do not have political institutions through which they could channel such opposition. If the emergent left parties, however, succeed in building a broad political-electoral base among the poor and marginalized and, on the basis of this, chalk up more and more electoral victories, then they could be the ones performing the function of organizing participation and aggregating the interests of the poor and marginalized and serving as their representatives in the state arena. Popular participation, instead of breaking out into ruptures, would come to have an institutional channel. Since the peasants, workers, women, etc. comprise the overwhelming majority of the country’s population, the new left parties could eventually find themselves in power. While taking a proactive stance towards political storms and ruptures, the new left parties should be looking forward, over the long term, to a *decreasing* number of ruptures, as this would be indicative of their own success.

The danger from undemocratic forces – the extreme right and the extreme left – should not be underestimated. Despite very slim chances of getting backing or recognition from foreign powers, disgruntled politicians and military officers have time and again hatched plots to engineer or instigate military revolts, coup attempts and uprisings. A return to authoritarian rule by ultra-right elements cannot be ruled out. The extreme left – the CPP-NPA – is not anywhere near seizing political power, but for the emergent left parties and groups, it definitely constitutes the greater and more immediate menace. Apart from assassinating “rejectionist” leaders like former NPA chief Kintanar and founding RPM-P leader Tabara, the CPP-NPA has killed members of rival left groups in Central Luzon, the Bondoc peninsula and several other places.

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<sup>11</sup> Huntington 1968, pp. 4, 10, 90-1.

Moreover, the CPP-NPA has harassed non-ND left activists in different parts of the country, especially during election campaign periods. Fortunately, the new left parties and groups have mainly restricted their response to political denunciations, those groups that still have guerrilla units have maintained their restraint, and no all-out war has ensued. The new left parties would have to keep up the political pressure on the CPP-NPA to desist from resorting to further violence in its rivalry with other left groups. As the Peruvian experience has shown, intra-left armed conflict could lead to a carnage as well as to the political marginalization of all of the left.

For the CPP-NPA and the NDs, going deeper into the state arena is not going to be easy. If they try to go beyond having a few seats in Congress and really move into local politics – elections as well as public office and governance – they could well find themselves in a truly knotty fool’s game. Engaging in local politics, especially local governance, on a national or broad scale would require a lot more personnel and attention than congressional work. Such engagement would have major consequences, such as shifts in actual emphasis from armed struggle and mass movements to electoral struggle and governance, and from revolutionary work in the countryside to work in urban areas and town centers. These would go against the fundamental principles of Maoist “protracted people’s war” strategy. A contest between “armed struggle” and “political struggle” advocates could arise and split the CPP-NPA and the ND movement yet again. It can, of course, be argued that the CPP-NPA and the NDs could choose to ignore local politics. If they do so, however, the emergent left parties and groups, which they regard as “renegades” and “counter-revolutionaries,” could make good in this arena, and gain strength and momentum.

For the emergent left parties and groups, forging a deeper unity has proven be an elusive goal. All of the new left groups have been fighting to transform the Philippines’ elite dominated democracy into a participatory and egalitarian democracy (or socialism and democracy). All of them oppose the rule of the oligarchic elite and the political representatives of this elite – the *trapos*. And all resist the moves and maneuvers of undemocratic forces of the extreme right and extreme left to seize power and to menace democratic forces. Thus far, however, the emergent left parties and groups have managed to forge only tactical alliances, often only on particular issues and concerns. If the new left groups want to become a truly significant force for the deepening of democracy in the Philippines, they would have move into more strategic unities and alliances. For achieving deeper unity, a key question that has to be resolved is the

issue of instrumental versus integral view of democracy. This is, of course, very much related to notions of democracy, the state, and revolution and reform. The emergent left groups are now much better equipped for resolving the issue. In a relatively short period of time, they have accumulated an amazing wealth of experience.

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